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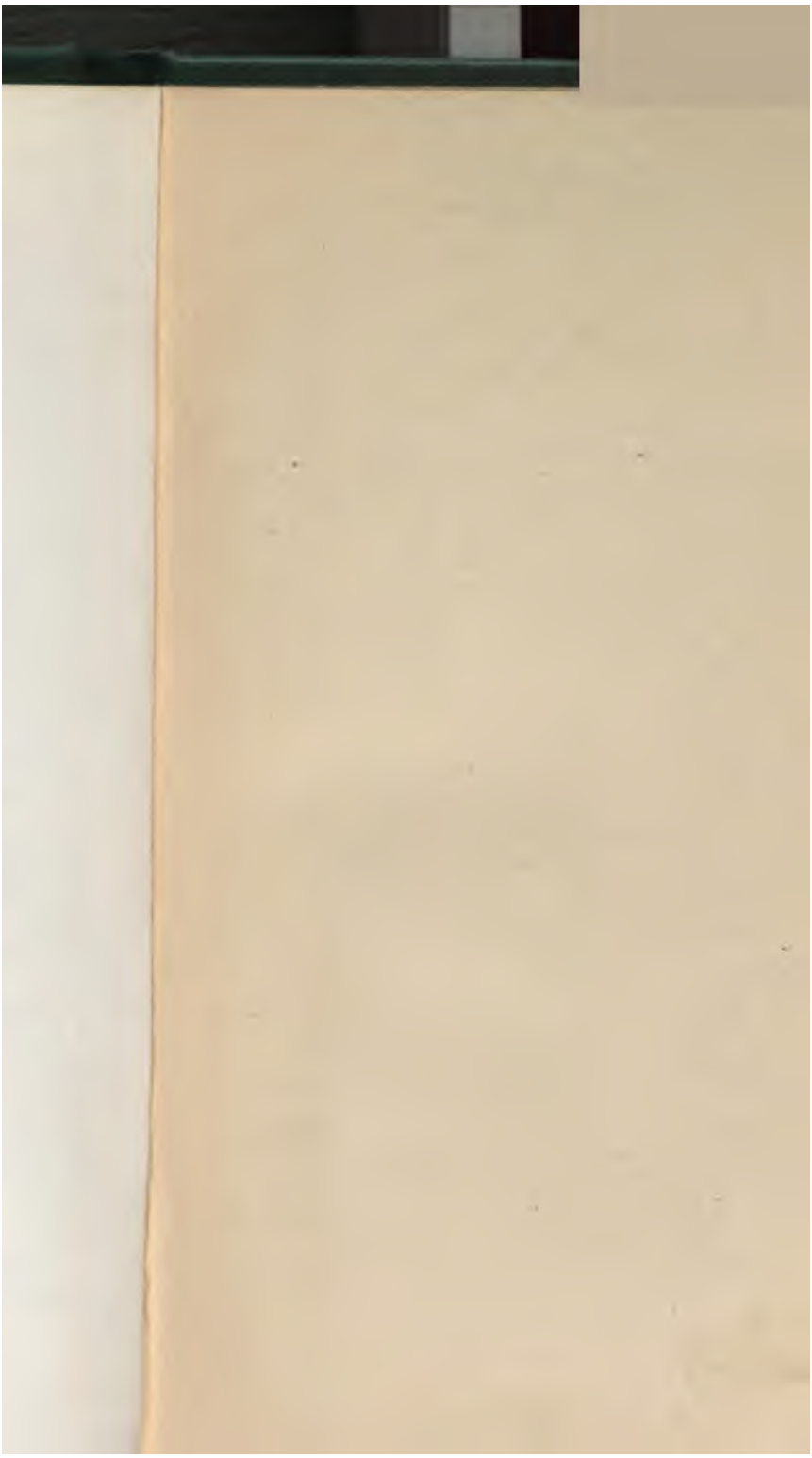

[See p.

"SOPHIA OFTEN DID MORE EXECUTION"

HEROINES OF FICTION

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By W. D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF

"LITERARY FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCE" ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. C. CHRISTY
A. I. KELLER, AND OTHERS

VOLUME I.

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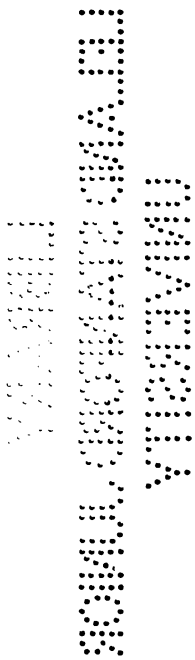

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October, 1901.

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HEROINES OF FICTION

HEROINES OF FICTION

SOME NINETEENTH-CENTURY HEROINES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IN proposing to confine these studies to the nineteenth-century heroines of Anglo-Saxon fiction, I find myself confronted by a certain question, which I should like to share with the reader.

A day, a month, a year, these are natural divisions of time, and must be respected as such; but a century, like a week or a fortnight, is a mere convention of the chronologers, and need not be taken very literally in its claim to be exactly a hundred years long. As to its qualities and characteristics, it had much better not be taken so; and in a study like the present one is by no means bound to date the heroines of nineteenth-century fiction from the close of the eighteenth century, even if the whole world were agreed just when that was. In fact, since the heroines of fiction are of a race so mixed that there is no finding out just where they came from, there is some reason why a study of nineteenth-century heroines should go back to their greatest-grandmothers in the Byzantine romances, or even beyond these, to the yet elder Greek lineages in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey." But there is still more reason why it should not do anything of the sort. We may amuse ourselves, if we choose, in tracing resemblances and origins; but, after

all, the heroines of English and American fiction are of easily distinguishable types, and their evolution in their native Anglo-Saxon environment has been, in no very great lapse of time, singularly uninfluenced from without. They have been responsive at different moments to this ideal and to that, but they have always been English and American; and they have constantly grown more interesting as they have grown more modern.

I

The best thing in the expression of any sort of modernity is a voluntary naturalness, an instructed simplicity; and there is no writer of the present moment, not Mr. Hardy, not Count Tolstoy himself, who is more modern than De Foe in these essentials, though De Foe wrote two hundred and fifty years ago. But we cannot go back to De Foe in this place any more than we could turn, say, to M. Zola. De Foe is distinctly of the nineteenth century in the voluntary naturalness and instructed simplicity of his art, but he is no more of the English nineteenth-century tradition, or principle or superstition, call it what you will, than M. Zola. He wrote the clearest, purest English, the most lifelike English; and his novels are of a self-evident and most convincing fidelity to life. But he was, frankly, of the day before we began to dwell in decencies, before women began to read novels so much that the novel had to change the subject, or so limit its discussion that it came to the same thing. De Foe was of a vastly nobler morality than Fielding, and his books are less corrupting; they are not corrupting at all, in fact; they are as well intentioned as Richardson's, which sometimes deal with experiences far from edifying in order to edify. He is a greater, a more modern artist than

either of the others; but because of his matter, and not because of his manner or motive, his heroines must remain under lock and key, and cannot be so much as named in mixed companies. De Foe's novels cannot be freely read and criticised; only his immortal romance is open to all comers, of every age and sex, and it is a thousand pities that "Robinson Crusoe" has no heroine. We must not begin to study our heroines of nineteenth-century fiction with him, though, æsthetically and ethically, nineteenth-century fiction derives from him in some things that are best in it, especially in that voluntary naturalness and instructed simplicity which are the chiefest marks of modernity.

We cannot begin a hundred years later with the heroines of Samuel Richardson, though one of them at least is as freshly modern as any girl of yesterday or to-morrow. Clarissa Harlowe, in spite of her eighteenth-century costume and keeping, remains a masterpiece in the portraiture of that Ever-Womanly which is of all times and places. The form of the novel in which she appears, the epistolary novel, is of all forms the most averse to the apparent unconsciousness so fascinating in a heroine; yet the cunning of Richardson (it was in some things an unrivalled cunning) triumphs over the form and shows us Clarissa with no more of pose than she would confront herself with in the glass. It is in her own words that she gives herself to our knowledge, but we feel that she gives herself truly, and with only the mental reserves that a girl would actually use: there is always some final fact that a girl must withhold.

She gives not herself alone, but all her environment, vividly, credibly, convincingly, in the letters she writes. She persuades us that she lives and suffers; and though it is preposterous in the novelist to study her love-affair so minutely as he does, it is not preposterous but most simple and natural for her to dwell upon it in

every detail. It is all the world, the centre of the universe to her experience, and however the author permits her to tire the reader, she cannot be supposed to tire herself or tire her ardent friend and correspondent, Miss Anna Howe, in her unstinted outpourings. Indeed, when the reader has once put himself in sympathy with a heroine who does not always deserve it, he too is eager for the smallest particulars of her pathetic fate.

The situation in "Clarissa Harlowe" is one which the author was apparently much more at home in than in the situations of either "Pamela" or "Sir Charles Grandison." Richardson was not native to the low life of the one or the high life of the other, but to the middle-class life where Clarissa Harlowe belongs. There, at ease in the setting, he had merely to imagine an impulsive, affectionate, right-principled girl, persecuted by her philistine family, who try to force he into a hateful marriage, till they drive her to the p tection of the lover who plots her ruin. It is very aginable that when she cannot save herself from she should reject the offer of his hand, and tha should die of her griefs; but these are not the vit of the case from an artistic point of view. Fro a point of view, the heroine's gentle and lovable the characters of the different personages, and cidents that arise from them and reveal them main matters, and it is here that Richardson greatest success. Clarissa is more lifelike in does than in what she says, for she has to say though in her spirited resentment of her v her detestable family, she brings palpab her weak mother and father, her hateful sis brother, and all the abetting cousins a uncles. Her waverings, however, her h withdrawals, her resistances and persis these that the author most truly finds

her. As he finds her and reveals her she is like girls of our widely different circumstance in the measure that many great-grandmotherly miniatures are like the photographs of their great-granddaughters. She is, in her character, of the nineteenth century, but in her environment she is almost as impossible as the heroines of De Foe, from whom she derives in the right realistic line.

II

It remained for a still later, but not much later, novelist to portray in the sister-heroines of "The Vicar of Wakefield," two dear girls who are far more appreciable and acceptable to our nineteenth-century notions. They are as distinctly of the eighteenth-century circumstance as Clarissa Harlowe, but they are somehow so transcendently imagined that they have survived into our time with the effect of being born in it.

It can hardly be claimed that Goldsmith was a greater imagination than Richardson; but he was certainly a greater artist. He had the instinct of reticence, which Richardson had not, and it is not going much too far to say that the nineteenth-century English novel, as we understand it now, with its admirable limitations, was invented by Oliver Goldsmith. The novel that respects the right of innocence to pleasure in a true picture of manners, and honors the claim of inexperience to be amused and edified without being abashed, was his creation. He did not know himself, perhaps, how wonderfully he was prophesying, in "The Vicar of Wakefield," the best modern fiction of England and America.

He does not portray the incidents or characters which Richardson studies with a pious abhorrence, or Fielding with a blackguardly sympathy. His realism stops short of the facts which may appall or which may defile

the fancy. It contents itself with the gentle domestic situation of the story and its change from happiness to misery through chances none the less probable because they are operated by the author so much more obviously than they would be now by an author of infinitely less inspiration. Such an artist would not now accumulate disaster upon Dr. Primrose's head so clearly with his own hand; disaster has become much more accustomed to the affliction of fictitious character and makes its approaches with the indirectness and delays noticeable in the actual world. Neither would such an artist have employed means so little psychological as the good man's sudden loss of fortune and his swift precipitation to misery by the wretch who breaks the heart of his daughter, and spoils the joy of all those harmless lives. Happily for the finer art of our time, the betrayer does not now imaginably find his way into the family of a country clergyman with the intent to dishonor and destroy it; but even in the brutal time when such things were justly imaginable the author spares us the worst with a sort of prophetic sensibility. The fair Olivia is, indeed, eloped with if not quite abducted; things could not be otherwise managed in that day without defiance of the traditions alike of fiction and of fact; but she stoops to folly only through a mock marriage, and this in the end, as is well known, proves a real marriage, thanks to the twofold duplicity of the wicked lover's agent, who, for purposes of his own, has had the ceremony performed by a real clergyman. Her tragic fate gives her a sort of dignity not innate in her; and in her potential relenting towards the ultimate disaster of the scoundrel who has so cruelly misused her, she has the highest charm of the Ever-Womanly—at least to the Ever-Manly witness. But it is at no time pretended that she is a wise person, even by the fond father who tells the story of his family. "Olivia, now about eigh-

"OLIVIA HAD A LUXURIANCY OF BEAUTY"

teen," he says in such antithetical portraiture of his daughters as the age delighted in, "had that luxuriancy of beauty with which painters generally draw Hebe; open, sprightly and commanding. Sophia's features were not so striking at first, but often did more execution; for they were soft, modest and alluring. Olivia wished for many lovers; Sophia to secure one. Olivia was often affected from too great desire to please; Sophia even repressed excellence from her fear to offend. . . . I have often seen them exchange characters for a whole day together. A suit of mourning has transformed my coquette into a prude, and a new set of ribbands has given her younger sister more than natural vivacity."

III

It is a picture that makes one wish the more that the good doctor had carried his complaisance a little farther and told us what color his girls' eyes and hair were of, and which was the taller or slighter. In the absence of positive information one is left to suppose from the internal evidence that Olivia was large and fair, and Sophia of a low stature and a brunette complexion; or the reverse, as one likes. As to their dress, that is not so wholly matter of conjecture, for their father tells us that even after the loss of his fortune, when they were forced to live humbly like their country neighbors, he "still found them attached to their former finery. They still loved laces, ribbands, bugles and catgut; my wife herself retained a passion for her crimson paduasoy. . . . When we were to assemble in the morning at breakfast, down came my wife and daughters dressed out in all their former splendor: their hair plastered up with pomatum, their faces patched to taste, their trains bundled up into a heap behind, and rustling at every motion."

It is well known how the ladies were portrayed in the famous picture of the Primrose family, which, when the wandering limner had finished it out-doors, was found too big to be got into the house. "My wife desired to be represented as Venus, and the painter was requested not to be too frugal of his diamonds in her stomacher and hair. . . . Olivia would be drawn as an Amazon, sitting upon a bank of flowers, dressed in a green joseph, richly laced with gold, and a whip in her hand. Sophia was to be a shepardess, with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing."

The behavior of the ladies was in conformity to the dispositions respectively assigned to them; but all the world has long been too familiar with it to suffer more than one or two illustrative instances. When young Thornhill first presented himself without invitation among them, it is known how coldly they received him, but how, when he refused to be repulsed, they relented and the girls, at their mother's bidding, played ar sang for him. "Mr. Thornhill seemed highly deligh with their performance and choice, and then took the guitar himself. He played very indifferently; my eldest daughter repaid his former applause with terest, and assured him that his tones were louder than those of her master. . . . As soon as h gone my wife called a council. . . . 'Te Sophia, my dear, what do you think of our new Don't you think he seemed to be very good-n 'Immensely so, indeed, mamma,' replied she. he has a great deal to say upon every subject never at a loss; and the more trifling the su more he has to say.' 'Yes,' cried Olivia, 'h enough for a man, but for my part I don't muc he is so extremely impudent and familiar; guitar he is shocking.'"

It is of course in keeping with her chara

"THE GIRLS PLAYED AND SANG FOR HIM"

mother meets her hapless daughter with cruel upbraiding when she comes back to her ruined home, but wholly forgives her in the end when she finds that Olivia has been incontestably "made an honest woman of" by the machinations of her betrayer's betrayer. Mrs. Primrose, however, is by no means a harsh nature, even if she is a woman so little wiser than some men. She is always a most acceptable presence in the story, and never more so than when she is most foolish. She is very modern in being of the illogical and inconsequent type of her sex which fiction has rather over-delighted in painting since her day. Probably there were hints of her in fiction from the very beginning, but it was Goldsmith who first painted one of the many ancestresses of Mrs. Nickleby in full length. She reasons from her wishes and believes from her hopes, with those vast leaps from premises to conclusions which we have all witnessed in ladies of her mental make, both in and out of novels. She prevails by the qualities of her heart, and her adequacy to most domestic occasions shows that the home may be governed with as little wisdom as the world. She influences the sage Sophia as strongly as the giddy Olivia, and it is pleasant to see how she is held in her motherly supremacy by the affection of her children, and the love of her husband, who perfectly understands her. In fact, a very pretty case might be made out of her as the real heroine of the book.

She and Olivia are both of much more readily perceptible quality than Sophia. One expects Olivia to do what she does; it is almost inevitable; and then one expects an interval of good sense in her after her misfortunes, which, it is intimated, have chastened without essentially changing her. Sophia is a more difficult nature to deal with, for her charm has to be shown in negative ways. She has a great deal more mind than either her mother or sister, but she is mostly subject to

them, and follows their lead as younger daughters and sisters do, or at least used to do. She will practically share in many of Olivia's absurdities in spite of her greater light and knowledge, and she is preserved from her disasters apparently by a fate that does not always befriend passive principle. It is just in her passivity, however, that she is so dear to the heart, so like so many other nice girls who are often so much wiser than anything they do, or even say. One of Mr. Thomas Hardy's heroines is reported to have been able to converse like a philosopher, but to be apt, in emergency, to behave like a robin in a green-house. If this was not quite the case with Sophia, it must be owned that her main superiority to Olivia was shown in her being fallen in love with by a better man, and in her refusing to be carried off by the villain who had deceived her sister; though it ought to be said in Olivia's behalf that it is much easier to resist being carried off against your will than with it.

IV

It was the age of moral sentiments, and to have them at hand was the sovereignest thing against temptation from without and within. Heroines used to express them whenever the least danger threatened, and sometimes when they were in perfect safety. Under instruction of the good Samuel Richardson they sought the welfare of themselves, their lovers, and their correspondents in formularies prescribing the virtues for every exigency, and praising right conduct with a constancy which ought to have availed rather more promptly than it did. But neither of the girls in "The Vicar of Wakefield" is very profuse of them, and this marks, either a lapsing faith in their efficacy, or a rising art in the novelist. Goldsmith, at any rate, confines the pre-

EVELINA

cepts and reflections to the father of his heroines, as he might fitly do in the case of the supposed narrator; Richardson, or rather the epistolary form of his novels, obliges his heroines to make them. Yet he was a great master, and, in spite of his preaching, a great artist. He was a man of a mighty middle-class conscience, and in an age not so corrupt as some former ages, but still of abominable social usages, he could not withhold the protest of a righteous soul, though he risked rendering a little tedious the interesting girls who uttered it for him.

He was blamed for portraying facts which were not so edifying as the morals to be drawn from them; and this may have been why he made his heroines so didactic. Somehow he had to trim the balance, and if the faithful portraiture of vice involved danger of contamination to the reader, virtue must be the more explicit and prodigal of its prophylactics and antidotes. His excess in both directions was corrected by the wiser art if not the purer instinct of the group of great women novelists who inherited his moral ideals and refined upon his materials and methods. Society had perhaps not grown much less licentious when Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen began to write, but it was growing less openly licentious, and it might be studied in pictures less alarming to propriety, if not to innocence.

These women, who fixed the ideal of the Anglo-Saxon heroines, wrote at the close of the last century and the beginning of this, some thirty years after the masterpieces of Richardson appeared, and fifteen or twenty years after "The Vicar of Wakefield" imparted to all Europe the conception of a more exquisite fiction. In some sort Richardson served them as a model, and Goldsmith as an inspiration, but it was they who characterized the modern Anglo-Saxon novel which these masters had perhaps invented. The most beautiful, the most

consoling of all the arts owes its universal acceptance among us, its opportunity of pleasing and helping readers of every age and sex, to this group of high-souled women. They forever dedicated it to decency; as women they were faithful to their charge of the chaste mind; and as artists they taught the reading world to be in love with the sort of heroines who knew how not only to win the wandering hearts of men, but to keep their homes pure and inviolable. They imagined the heroine who was above all a Nice Girl; who still remains the ideal of our fiction; to whom it returns with a final constancy, after whatever aberration; so that probably if a composite photograph of the best heroines of our day could be made, it would look so much like a composite miniature of their great-great-grandmothers in the novels of these authors that the two could not well be told apart.

FRANCES BURNEY'S EVELINA

THE author and the heroine of "Evelina" can never be quite separable in the fancy of the reader who studies the characters of both in the stories of their lives, though their lives themselves were so very different; and the happiness that came to the heroine so dramatically and so decisively was so long a time on its way to the author.

I

"Evelina" was published in 1788 and made its instant success; a few years later, her sister-heroine "Cecilia" appeared in the novel of that name, and yet a few years later the brilliant young author was tempted from her charming home, the fond circle of her friends such as Johnson, Burke and Reynolds, the public that idolized her, to become the waiting-woman of the commonplace queen of George III. It was an error so cruel that it hurts one yet to think of it; one rages against it as if it were still actual, and is not consoled by the fact that the victim never thoroughly realized her suffering as wrong to literature. It spoiled her career, and broke her health, but she seems to have thought to the last that her slavery was an honor; and she was prouder of the kindness which her devotion had inspired even in the heart of royalty, than of anything else in her history. When after five years she left the grudging queen's service, her father, who had urged her to enter it, could never understand why she wished to leave it. He indeed welcomed her back to her home and her broken

literary life, and many years later she began to write novels again; but the simplicity, the girlish spirit, the young grace was gone from her work, and "Camilla" and "The Wanderer" are conscious, academic poses of a talent once so spontaneous. It was a talent once so spontaneous, so vivid, so unaffected, that when Fanny Burney first had before her the task of depicting the nature and behavior of "A Young Lady on her Entrance in the World," she looked in her glass for her model, and wrought with the naïveté of the true artist, especially the true artist who is also young.

It is not to be supposed that she purposely drew herself in Evelina Anville. That is not the way of good art, though the end, the effect is self-portraiture. It is essential to the charm of a fictitious character that he or she who makes it in his or her image should not be aware of doing so; and no doubt Miss Burney kept well within her illusions. If she had perfectly known what she was doing, there would have been touches of self-defence, of self-flattery in Evelina which would have spoiled our pleasure in her; but probably there were people who knew who Evelina was at the time, if Miss Burney did not, and had not to wait nearly fifty years for the "Diary and Letters of Mme. D'Arblay" to let them into the open secret. The great Dr. Johnson knew it, and if he did not declare it, he came little short of it in his recognition of her admirable and endearing qualities. The great Mr. Burke must have known it, and all that famous and friendly company which resorted to her father's house when the timid and gentle girl suddenly astonished them by proving herself a novelist hitherto unrivalled in a certain charm and truth.

II

Before "The Vicar of Wakefield" there had been no English fiction in which the loveliness of family life

had made itself felt; before Evelina the heart of girlhood had never been so fully opened in literature. There had been girls and girls, but none in whom the traits and actions of the girls familiar to their fathers, brothers and lovers were so fully recognized; and the contemporaneity instantly felt in Evelina has lasted to this day. The changes since her entrance into the world have been so tremendous that we might almost as well be living in another planet, for all that is left of the world she so trembled at and rejoiced in. But whoever opens the book of her adventures, finds himself in that vanished society with her, because she is herself so living that she makes everything about her alive.

She is of course imagined upon terms of the romantic singularity which we no longer require in letting a nice girl have our hearts. Her father is of a species so very hard-hearted as to be extinct now, even in the theatre. He denies his marriage with her mother, and destroys the proof of it for no very apparent motive (he seems to have been very much in love with his wife), except to equip his daughter with a mystery and an unnatural parent for purposes of fiction. He retires into the background of the story before Evelina is born, and does not emerge from it until he is needed to be forgiven at the end, when he bestows her hand upon the hero with proper authority. In the mean time she has been brought up in great seclusion by the Rev. Arthur Villars, a friend of her mother's father, who has devoted himself to her education, and has cherished her as if she were his own child. It is solely to him that her fondest thoughts and affections turn when at the age of seventeen she leaves Berry Hill with his approval and launches upon the gay world of London in the care of certain friends of his.

It duly appears that, besides the exceptionally ruth-

less father who will have nothing to do with her, Evelina has a very terrible grandmother, who was an English servant when her beauty caught the young fancy of Evelina's grandfather. He expiates his passion by many years of marriage with her in France, and after his death she returns in a second widowhood to London, just at the moment Evelina is entering the fashionable world there, and becomes the low comedy and low tragedy of the story. She is not only very awful herself, with a French bourgeois vulgarity thickly overlaying her English servile vulgarity, but she is surrounded by Evelina's city cousins, who have a cockney vulgarity all their own, and for whom she claims the girl's affection, together with her duty to herself. They complicate the poor child's relations with the finer world to which she belongs by instinct and breeding, in all sorts of ways; and if anything could prevent her predestined union with the exemplary Lord Orville, their behavior would do it. She is horribly ashamed of them, but she does nothing cruel to escape them, and she submits to her grandmother not only because she must, but because she will. In short, at the moment when snobbery was first coming to its consciousness in literature Evelina was not a snob. She otherwise shows herself a thoroughly good girl, and she does it charmingly, though she has to do it without seeming to do so, in the long letters which she writes relating her adventures and which, with those of her correspondents, form the old-fashioned vehicle of the story.

III

Her letters are mostly addressed to the admirable, the almost too admirable, Mr. Villars, who replies to her abounding confidences with sympathy and wisdom

"'YOU ARE MISSING THE MOST DELIGHTFUL DANCE'"

from his seclusion at Berry Hill. In an age of unfeeling fathers his tenderness is more than paternal, but except that the story would have had to stop if he had done so, there seem times when he might have usefully given her a little more paternal protection. He has armed her against fate merely with a variety of high principles, and Evelina herself has to own that she is never in trouble when she is true to them. She learns very early the difference between meaning to behave always in perfect conformity to them and really doing so, for at her very first ball she refuses to dance with a fop she does not like, and, forgetting she has told him she is not dancing at all, she dances with Lord Orville, whom she does like from the moment she sees him. Worse than this, she cannot help laughing at the beau's grotesque indignation with her innocent perfidy; and at the very next ball she has profited so little by her experience that she again falls a prey to her own rather ingenuous duplicity. Lord Orville did not come to ask her for the first dance, as she hoped he might; but "a very fashionable, gay-looking man, who seemed about thirty years of age, . . . begged the honor." Her chaperon, from whom she had become separated, had told her "it was highly improper for a young woman to dance with strangers at any public assembly," and not wishing to risk the sort of offence she had given at her first ball, she answers this gentleman that she is engaged already. "I meant," she writes to Mr. Villars, and she owns that she blushes to write it, "to keep myself at liberty to dance or not, as matters should fall out. . . . He looked at me as if incredulous . . . asked me a thousand questions, and at last he said: 'Is it really possible a man whom you have honored with your acceptance can fail to be on hand? You are missing the most delightful dance in the world. . . . Will you give me leave to seek him? . . . Pray,

what coat has he on? . . . My indignation is so great that I long to kick the fellow round the room.'" In vain she tries to escape her lively tormentor; to her shame and confusion he attaches himself to her and leads the way through the rooms, entreating her to let him find her recreant partner. "'Is that he?' pointing to an old man who was lame, 'or that?' And in this manner he asked me of whoever was old or ugly in the room." She frankly tells him at last that he has spoiled all her happiness for the whole evening, but he will not leave amusing himself with her distress till she feigns at sight of Lord Orville that it is he whom she was to dance with. She does no more than glance at his lordship, but that is quite enough for her persecutor. "His eyes instantly followed mine. 'Why, is *that* the gentleman?' . . . At this instant Mrs. Mirvan, followed by Lord Orville, walked up to us, . . . when this strange man, destined to be the scourge of my artifice, exclaimed, 'Ha, my Lord Orville!—I protest I did not know your lordship. What can I say for my usurpation? Yet, faith, my Lord, such a prize should not be neglected!' My shame and confusion were unspeakable. Who could have supposed or foreseen that this man knew Lord Orville? But falsehood is not more unjustifiable than unsafe! Lord Orville—well he might—looked all amazement. 'The philosophic coldness of your lordship,' continued this odious creature, 'every man is not endowed with.' . . . He suddenly seized my hand, saying, 'Think, my Lord, what must be my reluctance to resign this fair hand to your lordship!' In the same instant Lord Orville took it of him. . . . To compel him then to dance I could not endure, and eagerly called out, 'By no means—not for the world! I must beg—' 'Will you honor *me* with your commands, madam?' cried my tormentor. . . . 'But do you dance or not? You see his lord-

ship waits!' . . . 'For Heaven's sake, my dear,' cried Mrs. Mirvan, who could no longer contain her surprise, 'what does all this mean? Were you pre-engaged? Had Lord Orville—' 'No, madam,' cried I,—'only—only I did not know this gentleman—and so I thought—I intended—I—' . . . I had not strength to make my mortifying explanation; my spirits quite failed me, and I burst into tears. They all seemed shocked and amazed. . . . 'What have I done?' exclaimed my evil genius, and ran officiously for a glass of water. However, a hint was sufficient for Lord Orville, who comprehended all I would have explained. He immediately led me to a seat, and said to me in a very low voice, 'Be not distressed, I beseech you; I shall ever think my name honored by your making use of it.'"

IV

The scene in the ball-room, where Evelina becomes the prey of the tease whom she has not meant to deceive harmfully, is one of many in which Sir Clement Willoughby pursues and torments her. He begins by teasing her, and ends by loving her, but he never imagines marrying her. That is reserved for Lord Orville, who thought her rather a poor thing at first, but comes more and more to feel her charm and realize her worth. She has not an instant's misgiving as to him. From the earliest moment she finds his "conversation really delightful. His manners are so elegant and so gentle, so unassuming that they engage esteem and diffuse complacence," quite as they would with Dr. Johnson, in whose diction Miss Burney upon this occasion speaks for her heroine. But in fact Lord Orville *is* a gentleman and not a prig, at a time when the choice between being a prig and being a blackguard was difficult for a young

man in good society. It has been rather the custom of criticism to decry this hero, but he never shows himself unequal to his great office of appreciating Evelina. No matter what box she is in he divines that she got there for some reason that was honorable to her heart if not to her head.

It is with a fine courage that Miss Burney shows her heroine in her silliness as well as her sense, but she can do this without that suspicion of satirizing her sex which would attach to a writer of the other sex. In fact, one great charm of the story is that it is not satire at all. It is mostly light comedy; it is sometimes low comedy; it is at other times serious melodrama; but the lesson from it is never barbed, and the author's attitude towards her characters has never that sarcastic knowingness which has been the most odious vice of English novelists.

V

It was an age when in a lady's house, and almost in the presence of the man who loves her, a young girl could be pursued by the impudent addresses of men who thought her too poor and too humble for marriage. This is Evelina's fate, which she thinks hard, but does not seem to think exceptional; though she is at least preserved from being carried off by such a man. She is indeed inveigled from her friends at the opera by Sir Clement Willoughby, who had known her only as a gentleman might know a young lady in society nowadays, and hurried into his chariot (it looks like a coupé in the old pictures), to be driven anywhere but to her chaperon's address. She saves herself by putting her head out of the window and screaming; then he drives home with her; but the incident does not seem to put an end to their acquaintance, or even to his professions of love.

"'BE NOT DISTRESSED, I BESEECH YOU'"

Nothing does that but her engagement to Lord Orville, who, till he asks her to marry him, could not have seen anything so very monstrous in Sir Clement Willoughby's behavior, though he would himself have been incapable of it.

The elopement as a popular means of moving the reader flourished much longer in fiction; but apparently the abduction, which had been so frequently and so effectively employed, was already going out; and in Evelina we find it reduced to such a poor attempt as Sir Clement Willoughby's. It was perhaps going out in society, but it would not be safe to say it had gone out. Probably in the last decades of the century, an heiress would not, even in Ireland, be attacked by her cousin in her uncle's presence, and carried off shrieking, with her clothes half torn from her person, to be tied hand and foot and bound upon a horse behind her captor; or, when she had flung herself to the ground and got possession of a sword for her defence, would be savagely stabbed by one of the abducting party, and then buried to her chin in a bog to hide her from the pursuit of her rescuers. But all this happened about 1745 to Miss Macdermot, who saved herself from a forced marriage with her abductor by catching a pipkin of hot milk from the fire and flinging it into the face of the officiating priest.

Horace Walpole sneered, and probably with reason, at Richardson's novels as pictures of English high life. The old printer, who once had all Europe thrilling over his pages, must have made many minor mistakes as to the diction and deportment of people of fashion; but doubtless he knew his times very well, and would not go astray in the particulars of an abduction, even an abduction in high life.

In few of the novels before "Evelina" could the reader help being privy to some such high-handed outrage.

All over England heroines were carried off in chairs and chariots to lonely country houses, there to be kept at the mercy of their captors till the exigencies of the plot forced their release. It must have been a startling innovation that Evelina should be let off so easily as she was, but even this was not so strange as that in an age of epistolary fiction she should be allowed to portray in herself that character of a bewitching goose that she really was, and that her author should effect this without apparent knowingness, or any manner of wink to the reader. Evelina is a masterpiece, and she could not be spared from the group of great and real heroines. The means of realizing her are now as quaint and obsolete almost as the manners of the outdated world to which she was born. Nobody writes novels in letters any more; just as people no longer call each other *Sir* and *Madam*, and are *favored* and *obliged* and *commanded* upon every slight occasion; just as young ladies no longer cry out, when strongly moved, "Good God, sir," in writing to their reverend guardians; or receive prodigious compliments; or make set speeches, or have verses to them posted in public places; or go to amusements where they are likely to be confused with dubious characters. Evelina is forced to see and to suffer things now scarcely credible, and it is her business in the long letters she writes her foster-father to depict scenes of vulgarity among her city cousins which make the reader shudder and creep. She depicts other scenes among people of fashion which are not less vulgar, and are far crueller, like that where two gentlemen of rank have two poor old women run a race upon a wager and push the hapless creatures on to the contest with cheers and curses. A whole world of extinct characters and customs centres around her; but she outlives them all in the inextinguishable ingenuousness of a girlish mind which nothing pollutes, and in the purity of a nature to

which everything coarse and unkind is alien. She is tempted at times to laugh at things that other people think funny, but she seems a little finer even than her inventor in all this, and it appears less Evelina than Miss Burney who expects you to enjoy the savage comedy of Captain Mervin's insulting pranks at the expense of Madame Duval. In fine, Evelina, though a goose, is perhaps the sweetest and dearest goose in all fiction. We laugh at her (we must not forget that it is she herself who lets us laugh at her), but we love her, and we rejoice in the happiness which she finds so supernally satisfying, as she passes out of the story, panting with rapturous expectation of bliss in keeping of Lord Orville.

TWO HEROINES OF MARIA EDGEWORTH'S

FEW figures in literary history appeal to the remembrance so pathetically as the author of "Evelina." She had many trials which she bore with sweetness and blessings were mainly from her with little, and of overprizing and lid her, as if it were the effect of extraordinary virtue in them. Indeed, Fanny Burney *was* Evelina. She had not only written herself into the character of that heroine, but she had so thoroughly written herself out in it, that she seemed not to have had the stuff for another heroine left in her nature. Or, if this is going too far, it is certain that neither Cecilia nor Camilla makes herself remembered like Evelina as a real personality.

I

"Cecilia" was written while the author of "Evelina" was still Miss Burney, and before she entered the service of the Queen; "Camilla" was written long after she had left that service, and was published after she had become the wife of the émigré noble D'Arblay. In "Cecilia" she was not yet so overweighted by the fear and favor of the great Dr. Johnson that she wished to write her novels as he would have written them, and the language, if not quite the language of life, is often easy, gay, and natural. The mighty lexicographer was not to do his worst with her diction till many years later in "Camilla," where he prevailed with an effect which the image of a fawn advancing with the gait of a hippopotamus feeb

suggests, though in more vital things "Camilla" is far from a mistaken performance. All three of the Burney-D'Arblay novels are on the same ground. They have mainly to do with the London of rank and fashion, and the London of trade and vulgarity; but a good part of the action passes in the country, and another good part in the several English spas whose waters were then the mode, and whose pump-rooms are the scenes of so much love-making in contemporary fiction. But in both "Cecilia" and "Camilla," the nominal heroines are of a less engaging, a less amusing quality. Cecilia is a girl of much more sense than Evelina; she has wit and she has beauty; and yet somehow she fails to take the heart as Evelina does. She moves in a world much more ascertained in its characteristics, through a much more ingenious intrigue. A cloud of genteel company at a dozen different places is suggested; vivid and amusing figures swarm in the pages of the novel. There are, indeed, only too many of them for remembrance, though probably no one who has met such a type of "agreeable rattle" as Miss Lerolle will have quite forgotten her; or her anti-type of supercilious passivity, Miss Leeson. That Lady Honoria who likes getting her father angry because he makes such funny faces and swears so divertingly when he is in a temper, is perhaps not so justifiably dear to the fancy; but she outlives most of the serious personages in the reader's remembrance. In the handling of all, a sense of the author's maturing art grows upon the critic; and in fact the "Cecilia" as a novel is as much superior to the "Evelina" which preceded it as it is to the "Camilla" which followed it.

II

It is always possible, of course, that "Evelina" might have eventuated in "Camilla," even if the author had

not spent five or six years, as the Queen's tire-woman, in the narcotic neighborhood of royalty. The tendency which Richardson had given to the best English fiction, and which is so strongly felt in "The Vicar of Wakefield," might have persisted in Fanny Burney's novels, and overweighted them at last, though she had remained in the world of literature, and looked on uninterruptedly at the world of fashion. Society was then so bad, not in its standards, but in its indifference to them, that all decent writers had it on their consciences to better it to their utmost by the force of imaginary examples. Fiction had not yet conceived of the supreme ethics which consist in portraying life truly and letting the lesson take care of itself. After a hundred years this conception is not yet very clear to many novelists, or, what is worse, to their critics; and the novel, to save itself alive from the contempt and abhorrence in which the most of good people once held it, had to be good in the fashion of the sermon rather than in the fashion of the drama. It felt its way slowly and painfully by heavy sloughs of didacticism and through dreary tracts of moral sentiment to the standing it now has, and we ought to look back at its flounderings, not with wonder that it floundered so long, but that it ever arrived. In fact, it did not flounder so very long, and it arrived at what is still almost an ideal perfection in the art of Jane Austen. But first it had to pass through the school of Maria Edgeworth, who was as severe a disciplinarian as ever the lighter-minded muses came under. They have long since had their revenge, poor things, and she has had to pay for her severity in the popular superstition which still prevails that she was all precept, all principle, all preaching. Nothing could be more mistaken, as any one may prove who will turn to her entertaining novels of English fashionable life, her faithful and sympathetic sketches of Irish character, high and low. It is

known that Tourguénief, from his pleasure in her Irish stories, conceived the notion of making like studies of Russian conditions; that to this influence the world owes the "Notes of a Sportsman," and that the Russian serfs, from the influence of that book with the Czar, finally owed their emancipation.

Fame could have brought Maria Edgeworth's noble spirit no sweeter consolation than such an event; she would have counted such an indirect effect of her work infinitely beyond the inspiration of such a consummate artist as Tourguénief, but her long life ended just before our century had reached its fiftieth year, and thirty years before the serfs were freed. She began author well back in the eighteenth century, but she began novelist distinctly within the nineteenth. As her "Castle Rackrent" appeared in 1801, there can be no dispute concerning this fact; and no one who will read that capital story, or almost any other novel of hers, can question her right to stand with the foremost in nineteenth-century fiction by virtue of many things besides her priority in time. Such a reader will feel it his privilege, his highest pleasure, to help reverse the sentence which relegates this artist to the sad society of the mere sermoners. She did preach, there is no denying that, but she also pictured life so faithfully that Scott could wish for nothing greater than "Miss Edgeworth's wonderful power of vivifying all her persons, and making them live *as beings* in your mind."

She knew her Ireland closely, lovingly, humorously, down to the last whimsicality of the tatterdemalion peasantry and the last eccentricity of the reckless, jovial gentry; but she knew her England, too, and the scenes of London fashion in her books are as graphic as Fanny Burney's. Indeed, it cannot be said that those London stories which have Ireland for a background are better than those which deal solely with

English interests and characters. "The Absentee" and its kind are of inferior æsthetic quality, for in these the author has a moral to enforce, a social principle to preach; and in the others she has only character to paint, and personal conduct to portray. For this reason such a novel as "Belinda" is a better test of her powers than "The Absentee." After all, there is no situation so universally appealing to the sympathy and the fancy as that which Miss Burney chose in "Evelina" and "Cecilia," and which Miss Edgeworth again chose in "Belinda." A young girl gently bred, and coming up for the first time from the country to view the world of London society with innocent, astonished eyes—what could be sweeter, more suggestive, more abundant in exciting chance than this?

III

Belinda Portman is no such *ingénue* as Evelina; she is of a far more sophisticated good sense even than Cecilia, whose more reasoned and tempered innocence she rather partakes. She has a very worldly-minded Mrs. Selina Stanhope for her aunt, who at Bath arranges her invitation for a London season from Lady Delacour, and supplies her with a store of mundane maxims, such as Mrs. Stanhope had found effectual in managing the matrimonial campaigns of five other nieces. The first interesting quality in Belinda is that she has not the wish to profit by this dark wisdom of Mrs. Stanhope's; but early in her London career a mortifying accident acquaints her with the fact that she is supposed to be there to further these matchmaking schemes of her aunt. She is already in love with one of the young men she hears talking her over, and with the hurt to her girlish dignity and delicacy, she begins to think and to reflect. From that hour her evolution

into a woman of good sense and good-will, of magnanimous impulses and generous actions is probably and entertainingly accomplished by the author, with unfailing confidence in an apparently inexhaustible knowledge of the London world.

What this world was, how dissipated, unprincipled, brutal, reckless, steeped in debt and drink, has never been more frankly shown. The moral is always present in the picture, and it is too often applied with inartistic directness, but it is not always so applied. There are abundant moments of pure drama, when the character is expressed in the action; and though much of the motive that ought to be seen is stated, still enough of it is seen to constitute the story a work of art. The author proves herself in all her books an æsthetic force; she was perverted in her artistic instincts by false ideals of duty; but she knew human nature, and when she would allow herself to do so she could represent life with masterly power. She does not get Belinda fully before the reader without many needless devices to deepen the intrigue, and many tiresome lectures to enforce the lesson, but she does give at last the full sense of a beautiful girl who gains rather than loses in delightfulness by growing wiser and better. Discreet Belinda has always been, but at first she is discreet for herself only; and at last she is wise for others as well. A fair half of the book might be thrown away with the effect of twice enriching what was left; perhaps two-thirds might be parted with to advantage; certainly all that does not relate to Belinda's friendship with Lady Delacour and her love for Clarence Harvey would not be missed by the reader who likes art better than artifice, and prefers to make his own applications of the facts. The friendship between Belinda and Lady Delacour is more important than the love between Belinda and Clarence; but if the story were reduced to

the tr wonderful study of Lady Delacour's passionate and d rted nature, she and not Belinda would be the heroine of "Belinda." As it is, it is she who has the greater ascination for the experienced witness, and for any stu ent of womanhood the dramatic portrayal of her jeal sy must appeal as a masterpiece almost unique in that rt.

IV

The do ady Delacour's household is promp h the mysterious contradictions that cloud nduct: the wild gayety, the listless melanc moody despair. "For some days after Beli ar town she heard nothing of Lord Delacour; his lady never mentioned his name except once accidentally, as she was showing Miss Portman the house. . . . The first time Belinda ever saw His Lordship, he was dead drunk in the arms of two footmen who were carrying him up-stairs to his bedroom; his lady, who was just returned from Ranelagh, passed him by on the landing-place with a look of sovereign contempt. 'What is the matter? Who is this?' said Belinda. 'Only the body of Lord Delacour,' said her ladyship. . . . 'Don't look so shocked and amazed, Belinda; don't look so *new*, child; this funeral of my lord's intellects is to me a nightly, or,' added her ladyship, looking at her watch and yawning, 'I believe I should say, a *daily* ceremony—six o'clock, I protest!' The next morning . . . after a very late breakfast, Lord Delacour entered the room. 'Lord Delacour, sober, my dear,' said her ladyship to Miss Portman, by way of introducing him."

The cat-and-dog life which this couple lead is very unreservedly portrayed, and Belinda is so far deceived as not to suppose that they can be in love with ea

other, in spite of all. My lord's days and nights are given to debauchery, his lady's to the wildest dissipation at balls and routs (one faintly imagines what a *rout* was!) and gay parties at those public resorts which were once so much the fashion in London, or at least in London novels, where from Vauxhall to Ranelagh, from Ranelagh to the Pantheon, from the Pantheon to Almack's, there is a perpetual glitter of their misleading lights.

On leaving the masquerade where Belinda has overheard that killing talk about herself among the young men of her circle, she repeats it in an anguish of shame to her friend, as they drive away from Lady Singleton's to the Pantheon, in their respective disguises of the tragic and the comic muse. "'And is this all?' cried Lady Delacour. 'Lord, my dear, you must either give up living in the world or expect to hear yourself, and your aunts, and your cousins, and your friends, from generation to generation, abused every hour in the day by their friends and your friends; 'tis the common course of things. Now you know what a multitude of obedient servants, dear creatures, and very sincere and most affectionate friends I have. . . . Do you think I'm fool enough to imagine that they would care the hundredth part of a straw if I were this minute thrown into the Red or the Black Sea?' . . . The carriage stopped at the Pantheon. . . . To Belinda the night appeared long and dull; the commonplace wit of chimney-sweepers and gypsies; the antics of harlequins; the graces of flower-girls and Cleopatras had nôt power to amuse her; for her thoughts still recurred to that conversation which had given her so much pain. . . . 'How happy you are, Lady Delacour,' said she, when they got into the carriage to go home, . . . 'to have such an amazing flow of spirits!' 'Amazing you might well say, if you knew all,' said Lady Dela-

cour, and she heaved a deep sigh, threw herself back in the carriage, let fall her mask, and was silent. It was broad daylight, and Belinda had a full view of her countenance, which was a picture of despair. . . . Her ladyship started up and exclaimed, 'If I had served myself with half the zeal I have served the world I should not now be thus forsaken. . . . But it is all over now. I am dying.' . . . Belinda . . . gazed at Lady Delacour, and repeated the word, 'Dying!' 'I tell you I am dying,' said her ladyship."

At home she bade Belinda "follow her to her dressing-room. . . . 'Come in; what is it you are afraid of?' said she. Belinda went in, and Lady Delacour shut and locked the door. There was no light except what came from the candle which Lady Delacour held in her hand. . . . Belinda, as she looked around, saw nothing but a confusion of linen rags; vials, some empty, some full, and she perceived there was a strong smell of medicines. Lady Delacour . . . looked from side to side of the room without seeming to know what she was in search of. She then, in a species of fury, wiped the paint from her face, and returning to Belinda, held the candle so as to throw the light full on her livid features . . . which formed a horrid contrast with her gay, fantastic dress. 'You are shocked, Belinda,' said she, 'but as yet you have seen nothing—look here'—baring half her bosom. . . . Belinda sunk back into a chair; Lady Delacour flung herself on her knees before her. 'Am I humbled, am I wretched enough?'"

The story of Belinda's friendship for the miserable woman from this moment on is imagined with a knowledge of human nature and a divination of its nobler possibilities worthy of Tolstoy, though it is wrought with an art indefinitely more fallible. Miss Edgeworth was not only in herself very inconstantly an artist, but,

"'AM I HUMBLED, AM I WRETCHED ENOUGH?'"

as is well known, she subordinated her judgment to that of her honored father, whom she allowed to meddle with her work, and mar it in the cause of good morals as much as he would. It is but fair to lay to the charge of her well-willing, ill-witting parent at least half of the crude and clumsy didacticism with which Belinda's fine nature is unfolded in her efforts to serve and to save Lady Delacour; but perhaps the crude and clumsy mechanism of the affair is all Miss Edgeworth's own. We may easily grant this, and still in the dramatic moments find enough evidence of her power to prove her a great artist.

Lady Delacour, of course, believes that she has a cancer, and she has put herself in the hands of a quack who preys upon her fears. Her secret is known only to her waiting-woman, till she herself betrays it to Belinda, whom she binds to her by the most solemn vows of silence. But the girl can find no peace till she has got Lady Delacour's leave to speak of it to a physician (who is, of course, Edgeworthianly over-wise and over-good); and as Belinda has not lived for several weeks under the roof of Lord Delacour without surprising in him some traits of kindness for his wife, she wins Lady Delacour's consent to let him know that some great calamity is threatening her. Belinda sets herself with all her innate discreetness to make them friends, but she does not, discreet as she is, manage this without rousing the jealousy of Lady Delacour, which finds food in her returning love for her husband. Seeing Belinda and Lord Delacour on such increasingly good terms in her interest, she can only believe that they wish to be on better in their own as soon as she is out of the way. As the story was always to end well, however, the cancer proves no cancer, and is cured with very slight scientific attention; Lady Delacour is reconciled to her husband without losing her friend, and Belinda is duly married

to Clarence Harvey, whom she has been in love with from the beginning.

Such a meagre résumé of merely one order of its events does no justice to the many-sided interest of the novel, and its rich abundance of characterization, which sometimes accuses itself of caricature, but which probably embodies a presentation of fashionable life at the beginning of our century faithfuller than it can now appear. Still, the jealousy of Lady Delacour, though but one interest of the story, becomes in its finer artistic treatment the chief interest; and the scene in which it betrays itself becomes the greatest moment of the drama. The episode is almost altogether admirable, but its climax sufficiently suggests the whole encounter between the unsuspecting Belinda and Lady Delacour, when her passion is fired by the girl's suppression of certain passages in a letter from her aunt Stanhope, giving some worldly advice which her ladyship ironically congratulates Belinda upon not needing.

"The rapid, unconnected manner in which Lady Delacour spoke, the hurry of her motions, the quick, suspicious, angry gleams of her eye, her laugh, her unintelligible words, all conspired at this moment to give Belinda the idea that her intellects were suddenly disordered. . . . She went towards her with the intention of soothing her by caresses; but at her approach Lady Delacour pushed the table on which she had been writing from her with violence; started up, flung back the veil which fell over her face as she rose, and darted upon Belinda a look which fixed her to the spot where she stood. . . . Belinda's blood ran cold—she had no longer any doubt that this was insanity. She shut the penknife that lay upon the table, and put it in her pocket. 'Cowardly creature!' cried Lady Delacour, and her countenance changed to an expression of ineffable contempt. 'What is it you fear?' 'That you

LADY DELACOUR

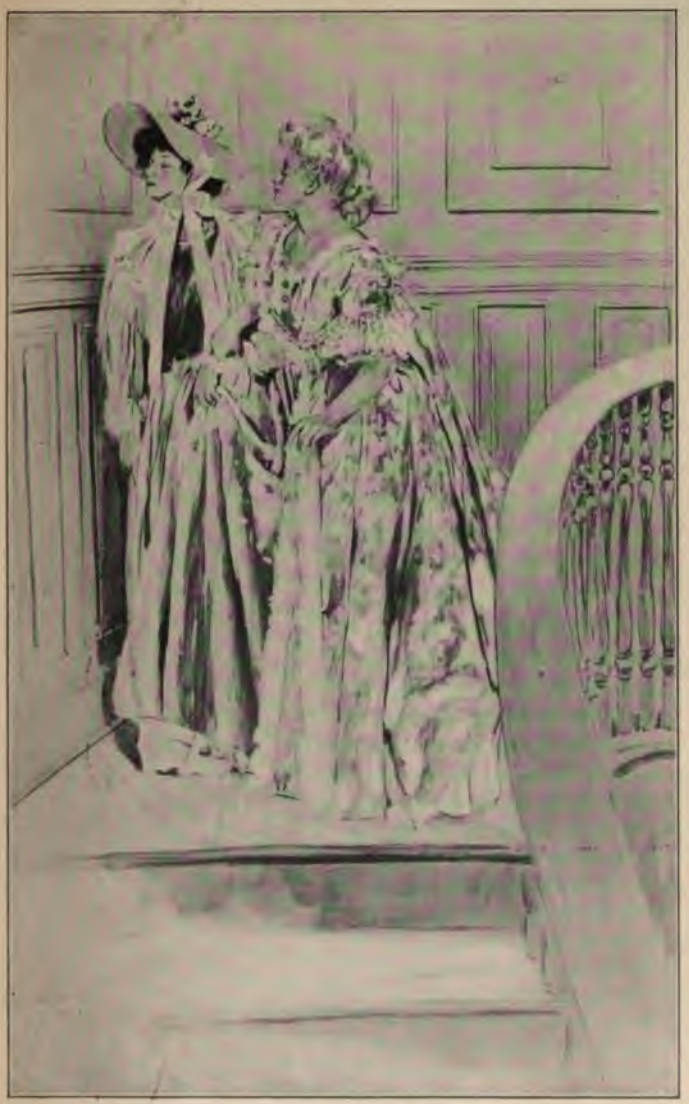
should injure yourself. Sit down—for Heaven's sake listen to your friend, to Belinda.' 'My friend! My Belinda!' cried Lady Delacour. . . . 'O, Belinda! You whom I have so loved, so trusted!' The tears rolled fast down her painted cheeks; she wiped them hastily away, but so roughly that she became a strange and ghastly spectacle. Unconscious of her disordered appearance, she rushed past Belinda, who vainly attempted to stop her, threw up the sash, and, stretching herself far out of the window, gasped for breath. Miss Portman drew her back, and closed the window, saying, 'The rouge is all off your face, my dear Lady Delacour; you are not fit to be seen.' . . . '*Rouge! Not fit to be seen!* At such a time as this, to talk to me in this manner! O, niece of Mrs. Stanhope! dupe, dupe, that I am.'"

Belinda tries to reason with Lady Delacour's jealousy, which takes the form of ironical meekness, only to burst out again in envenomed accusation. "'You are goodness itself, and gentleness, and prudence personified. You know perfectly how to *manage* her whom you fear you have driven to madness. But, tell me, good, gentle, prudent Miss Portman, why need you dread so much that I should go mad? . . . Nobody would believe me whatever I said. . . . And would not this be almost as if I were dead and buried? No; your calculations are better than mine: the poor mad wife would . . . yet stand between you and the fond object of your secret soul—a coronet. . . . O, Belinda, do not you see that a coronet cannot confer happiness?' 'I have seen it long; I pity you from the bottom of my soul,' said Belinda, bursting into tears."

Lady Delacour cannot believe the girl is leaving her house when she leaves the room; she determines to balk the hope of being pressed to stay, which she imagines in Belinda; and when some people call she swiftly re-

pairs her looks and goes to receive them. "Fresh rouged, and beautifully dressed, she was performing her part to a brilliant audience, when Belinda entered the drawing-room. . . . 'You dine with Lady Anne, Miss Portman, I understand. Though you talk of running away from me . . . I am with all due humility *so confident of the irresistible attractions of this house*, that I defy Oakley Park and all its charms. So, Miss Portman, instead of adieu, I shall only say *au revoir!*' 'Adieu, Lady Delacour!' said Belinda, with a look and tone that struck her ladyship to the heart. All her suspicions, all her pride, all her affected gayety forsook her. . . . She flew after Miss Portman, stopped her at the head of the stairs and exclaimed, 'My dearest Belinda, are you gone? My best, my only friend, say you are not gone forever! Say you will return!' 'Adieu,' repeated Belinda."

We are told that she broke from Lady Delacour with a heart full of pity for her, but sure of the right and wisdom of her course; and nothing in the whole scene between them is more finely ascertained than the delicate dignity and goodness with which Belinda behaves. In this she is worthy to be the heroine of her own story, and though she must divide the honors with Lady Delacour, in the dramatic moments, she has the heroine's true supremacy as a subtler study of character, and a newer type. The intensely emotional nature like Lady Delacour, vivid, violent, reckless, has been often done, and it is always fascinating; but it has seldom been so well done as by Miss Edgeworth, who, with a few touches of analysis, has allowed it to express itself. Yet, after all, a nature like Belinda's, ruled by principles and bound by scruples, the nature of a lady, is far more difficult to do.



"'YOU ARE NOT GONE FOREVER!'"

JANE AUSTEN'S ELIZABETH BENNET

THE fashion of Maria Edgeworth's world has long passed away, but human nature is still here, and the fiction which was so true to it in the first years of the century is true to it in the last. "The Absentee," "Vivian," "Ennui," "Helen," "Patronage," show their kindred with "Belinda," and by their frank and fresh treatment of character, their knowledge of society, and their employment of the major rather than the minor means of moving and amending the reader, they all declare themselves of the same lineage. In their primitive ethicism they own "Pamela," and "Sir Charles Grandison" for their ancestors; but they are much more dramatic than Richardson's novels; they are almost theatrical in their haste for a direct moral effect. In this they are like the Burney-D'Arblay novels, which also deal with fashionable life, with dissipated lords and ladies, with gay parties at Vauxhall and Ranelagh, with debts and duns, with balls and routs in splendid houses, whose doors are haunted by sheriff's officers, with bankruptcies and arrests, or flights and suicides. But the drama of the Edgeworth fiction tends mostly to tragedy, and that of the Burney-D'Arblay fiction to comedy; though there are cases in the first where the wrong-doer is saved alive, and cases in the last where he is lost in his sins. The author of "Evelina" was a good but light spirit, the author of "Belinda" was a good but very serious soul and was amusing with many misgivings. Maria Edgeworth

was a humorist in spite of herself; Frances Burney was often not as funny as she meant, and was, as it were, forced into tragical effects by the pressure of circumstances. You feel that she would much rather have got on without them; just as you feel that Miss Edgeworth rejoices in them, and is not sure that her jokes will be equally blessed to you.

I

It remained for the greatest of the gifted women, who beyond any or all other novelists have fixed the character and behavior of Anglo-Saxon fiction, to assemble in her delightful talent all that was best in that of her sisters. Jane Austen was indeed so fine an artist, that we are still only beginning to realize how fine she was; to perceive, after a hundred years, that in the form of the imagined fact, in the expression of personality, in the conduct of the narrative, and the subordination of incident to character, she is still unapproached in the English branch of Anglo-Saxon fiction. In American fiction Hawthorne is to be named with her for perfection of form; the best American novels are built upon more symmetrical lines than the best English novels, and have unconsciously shaped themselves upon the ideal which she instinctively and instantly realized.

Of course it was not merely in externals that Jane Austen so promptly achieved her supremacy. The wonder of any beautiful thing is that it is beautiful in so many ways; and her fiction is as admirable for its lovely humor, its delicate satire, its good sense, its kindness, its truth to nature, as for its form. There is nothing hurried or huddled in it, nothing confused or obscure, nothing excessive or inordinate. The marvel of it is none the less because it is evident that she wrote from

familiar acquaintance with the fiction that had gone before her. In her letters there are hints of her intimacy with the novels of Goldsmith, of Richardson, of Frances Burney, and of Maria Edgeworth; but in her stories there are scarcely more traces of their influence than of Mrs. Radcliffe's, or any of the romantic writers whom she delighted to mock. She is obviously of her generation, but in all literature she is one of the most original and independent spirits. Her deeply domesticated life was passed in the country scenes, the county society, which her books portray, far from literary men and events; and writing as she used, amidst the cheerful chatter of her home, she produced literature of still unrivalled excellence in its way, apparently without literary ambition, and merely for the pleasure of getting the life she knew before her outward vision. With the instinct and love of doing it, and not with the sense of doing anything uncommon, she achieved that masterpiece, "Pride and Prejudice," which is quite as remarkable for being one of several masterpieces as for its absolute excellence. There have been authors enough who have written one extraordinary book; but all Jane Austen's books are extraordinary, and "Persuasion," "Northanger Abbey," "Emma," "Mansfield Park," and "Sense and Sensibility," are each a masterpiece, inferior only to "Pride and Prejudice," which was written first. After the young girl of twenty had written it, she kept it half as many years longer before she printed it. In mere order of chronology it belongs to the eighteenth century, but in spirit it is distinctly of the nineteenth century, as we feel that cycle to have been when we feel proudest of it. In manners as much as in methods it is such a vast advance upon the work of her sister novelists that you wonder whether some change had not already taken place in English society which she notes, and which they fail to note.

The topics of the best fiction of any time will probably be those which decent men and women talk of together in the best company; and such topics vary greatly from time to time. There is no reason to think that Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth were less pure-minded than Jane Austen, but they dealt with phases of human experience which she did not deal with, because their friends and acquaintances did so, without being essentially worse than hers. A tendency towards a more scrupulous tone seems to have been the effect of the general revival in religion at the close of the last century, which persisted down to that time in our own century when the rise of scientific agnosticism loosed the bonds of expression. Now again of late years men and women in the best company talk together of things which would not have been discussed during the second and third quarters of the century. One must hedge one's position on such a point with many perhapses; nothing can be affirmed with certainty; the most that can be said is that the tone if not the temper, the manners if not the morals, which have lately been called *fin de siècle*, are noticeably more akin to what was *fin de siècle* a hundred years ago, than they are to what was thought fit in polite society fifty years ago. Possibly another revival of religion will bring another change, such as the purity of Jane Austen's fiction may have forecast rather than reported. But we do not know this, and possibly again her books are what they are in matter and manner because the little world of county society which she observed was wholesomer and decenter than the great world of London society which Miss Burney and Miss Edgeworth studied.

An author is as great for what he leaves out as for what he puts in; and Jane Austen shows her mastery in nothing more than in her avoidance of moving accidents for her most moving effects. She seems to have

known intuitively that character resides in habit, and that for the novelist to seek its expression in violent events would be as stupid as for the painter to expect an alarm of fire or burglary to startle his sitter into a valuable revelation of his qualities. She puts from her, therefore, all the tremendous contrivances of her predecessors, and takes her place quietly on the ground to which they were, the best of them, falteringly and uncertainly feeling their way. After De Foe and Goldsmith she was the first to write a thoroughly artistic novel in English, and she surpassed Goldsmith as far in method as she refined upon De Foe in material. Among her contemporaries she was as easily first as Shakspere among the Elizabethan dramatists; and in the high excellencies of symmetrical form, force of characterization, clearness of conception, simplicity and temperance of means, she is still supreme: that girl who began at twenty with such a masterpiece as "Pride and Prejudice," and ended with such a masterpiece as "Persuasion" at forty-two!

II

The story of "Pride and Prejudice" has of late years become known to a constantly, almost rapidly, increasing cult, as it must be called, for the readers of Jane Austen are hardly ever less than her adorers: she is a passion and a creed, if not quite a religion. A beautiful, clever, and cultivated girl is already piqued and interested if not in love with a handsome, high-principled, excessively proud man, when she becomes bitterly prejudiced against him by the slanders of a worthless beneficiary of his family. The girl is Elizabeth Bennet, the young man is Fitzwilliam Darcy, and they first meet at a ball, where he behaves with ungracious indifference to her, and afterwards at the dinners and par-

ties of a small country neighborhood where persons theoretically beyond the pale of gentility are admitted at least on sufferance; the stately manners of the day are relaxed by youth and high spirits; and no doubt the academic elevation of the language lapses oftener on the lips of the pretty girls and the lively young men than an author still in her nonage, and zealous for the dignity of her style, will allow to appear in the conversation of her hero and heroine.

From the beginning it seems to Darcy that Elizabeth shines in talk beyond all the other women, though sometimes she shines to his cost. But banter from a pretty girl goes farther than flattery with a generous man; and from the first Darcy is attracted by Elizabeth Bennet's wit, as much as he is repelled by her family. In fact, he cannot get on with her family, for though the Bennets have a sufficiently good standing, in virtue of the father's quality as a gentleman, it is in spite the mother's folly and vulgarity, and the folly and vulgarity of all her sisters but one. Mrs. Bennet is probably the most entire and perfect simpleton ever drawn in fiction, and her husband renders life with her supportable by amusing himself with her absurdities. He buries himself in his books and leaves her the management of his daughters in society, getting what comfort he can out of the humor and intellectual sympathy of Elizabeth and the charming goodness of her elder sister Jane. The rest of his family are almost as impossible to him as they are to Darcy, to whom Mr. Bennet himself is rather impossible, and who resolves not only to crush out his own passion for Elizabeth, but to break off his friend Bingley's love for her sister Jane. His success in doing the one is not so great but he duly comes to offer himself to Elizabeth, and he owns in the humiliation of rejection that he believes he has failed in the other.

JANE AUSTEN AT HER HARPSICHORD

From this point the affair, already so daringly imagined, is one of the most daring in fiction; and less courage, less art, less truth than the author brings to its management would not have availed. It is a great stroke of originality to have Darcy write the letter he does after his rejection, not only confessing, but defending his course; and it is from the subtle but perfectly honest sense of character in her heroine that the author has Elizabeth do justice to him in what she so bitterly resents. When she has once acknowledged the reason of much that he says of her family (and she has to acknowledge that even about her adored father he is measurably right), it is a question merely of friendly chances as to the event. These are overwhelmingly supplied, to Elizabeth's confusion, by Darcy's behavior in helping save her sister Lydia from the shame and ruin of her elopement with the worthless Wickham. Lydia, who is only less entirely and delightfully a fool than Mrs. Bennet herself, is thus the means of Elizabeth's coming to such a good mind in regard to Darcy that her only misgiving is lest it may be too late. But Darcy has been enlightened as well as she: he does everything a man can to repair his wrongs and blunders, and with a very little leading from Elizabeth, he is brought to offer himself again, and is accepted with what may be called demure transport, and certainly with alacrity.

There is nothing more deliciously lover-like than the talks in which they go over all the past events when they are sure of each other; and Elizabeth, who is apt to seem at other times a little too sarcastic, a little too ironical, is here sweetly and dearly and wisely herself. The latest of these talks was that in which she "wanted Mr. Darcy to account for his ever having fallen in love with her. 'How could you begin? I can comprehend your going on charmingly, when you had once made a beginning; but what could have set you off in the

first place?' 'I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look which first laid the foundation. . . . I was in the middle of it before I knew I *had* begun.' 'My beauty you had early withstood, and as to my manners —my behavior to *you* was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now, be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?' 'For the liveliness of your mind, I did.' 'You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused and interested you because I was so unlike *them*. Had you not been really amiable you would have hated me for it, but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just. . . . There, I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it, and, all things considered, I begin to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me, but nobody thinks of *that* when they fall in love. . . . What made you so shy of me when you first called, and afterwards dined here? . . . You might have talked to me more.' 'A man who felt less might.' 'How unlucky you should have a reasonable answer to give, and I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder how long you would have gone on if you had been left to yourself?' 'Lady Catharine's unjustifiable endeavors to separate us were the means of removing all my doubts. . . . My aunt's intelligence had given me hope, and I was determined at once to know everything.'"

The aunt whom Darcy means is Lady Catharine de Burgh, as great a fool as Mrs. Bennet or Lydia, and much more offensive. She has all Darcy's arrogance,

"WANTED MR. DARCY TO ACCOUNT FOR HIS EVER HAVING FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER"

without a ray of the good sense and good heart which enlighten and control it, and when she hears a rumor of his engagement to Elizabeth, she comes to question the girl. Their encounter is perhaps the supreme moment of objective drama in the book, and is a bit of very amusing comedy, which is the more interesting to the modern spectator because it expresses the beginning of that revolt against aristocratic pretension characteristic of the best English fiction of our century. Its spirit seems to have worked in the clear intelligence of the young girl to more than one effect of laughing satire, and one feels that Elizabeth Bennet is speaking Jane Austen's mind, and perhaps avenging her for patronage and impertinence otherwise suffered in silence, when she gives Lady de Burgh her famous setting-down.

"Lady Catharine very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything, and then, rising up, said to Elizabeth: 'Miss Bennet, there seems to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favor me with your company.' . . . Elizabeth obeyed, and running into her own room for her parasol, attended her noble guest down-stairs. . . . As soon as they reached the copse, Lady Catharine began in the following manner: 'You cannot be at a loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my visit hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I came.' Elizabeth looked with unaffected astonishment. 'Indeed, you are mistaken, madam; I have not been at all able to account for the honor of seeing you here.' 'Miss Bennet,' replied her ladyship in an angry tone, 'you ought to know that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere *you* may choose to be, you shall not find me so. . . . A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I

was told . . . that *you*, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew, to my own nephew, Mr. Darcy. Though I *knew* it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you.' 'If you believed it impossible to be true,' said Elizabeth, coloring with astonishment and disdain, 'I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by it?' 'This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist upon being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?' 'Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible.' 'It must be so while he retains the use of his reason. But *your* allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in.' 'If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.' 'Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. . . . This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. . . . Because honor, decorum, precedence, nay interest forbid it. Yes, Miss Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by his family or friends. . . . Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us. . . . Let us sit down. You are to understand, Miss Bennet, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose. . . . I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment.' '*That* will make your ladyship's situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on *me*.' 'I will not be interrupted! . . . If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up.' 'In marrying your nephew, I should not consider my-

self as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.' 'True, you *are* a gentleman's daughter. But what was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts?' . . . 'Whatever my connections may be,' said Elizabeth, 'if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to *you*.' 'Tell me, once for all, are you engaged to him?' Though Elizabeth would not for the mere purpose of obliging Lady Catharine, she could not but say, after a moment's deliberation, 'I am not.' Lady Catharine seemed pleased. 'And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement?' 'I will make no promise of the kind. . . . How far your nephew might approve of your interference in *his* affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in *mine*. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no further on the subject. . . . You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house.' And she rose as she spoke. Lady Catharine rose also and they turned back. Her ladyship was highly incensed. 'And this . . . is your final resolve! Very well, I shall know how to act. Do not imagine, Miss Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable; but depend upon it, I shall carry my point.' In this manner Lady Catharine talked on till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, she added, 'I take no leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased.' Elizabeth made no answer; and without attempting to persuade her ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it herself."

In all this the heroine easily gets the better of her antagonist not only in the mere article of *sauce*, to which it must be owned her lively wit occasionally tends, but

in the more valuable qualities of personal dignity. She is much more a lady than her ladyship, as the author means she shall be; but her superiority is not invented for the crisis; it springs from her temperament and character, cool, humorous, intelligent and just: a combination of attributes which renders Elizabeth Bennet one of the most admirable and attractive girls in the world of fiction. It is impossible, however, not to feel that her triumph over Lady de Burgh is something more than personal: it is a protest, it is an insurrection, though probably the discreet, the amiable author would have been the last to recognize or to acknowledge the fact. An indignant sense of the value of humanity as against the pretensions of rank, such as had not been felt in English fiction before, stirs throughout the story, and reveals itself in such crucial tests as dear "little Burney," for instance, would never have imagined. For when Miss Burney introduces city people, it is to let them display their cockney vulgarity; but though Jane Austen shows the people whom the Bennets' gentility frays off into on the mother's side vulgar and ridiculous, they are not shown necessarily so because they are in trade or the law; and on the father's side it is apparent that their social inferiority is not incompatible with gentle natures, cultivated minds, and pleasing manners.

"I TAKE NO LEAVE OF YOU, MISS BENNET'"

JANE AUSTEN'S ANNE ELIOT AND CATHARINE MORLAND

THAT protest already noted, that revolt against the arrogance of rank, which makes itself felt more or less in all the novels of Jane Austen, might have been something that she inhaled with the stormy air of the time, and respired again with the unconsciousness of breathing. But whether she knew it or not, this quiet little woman, who wrote her novels in the bosom of her clerical family; who was herself so contentedly of the established English order; who believed in inequality and its implications as of divine ordinance; who loved the delights of fine society, and rejoiced as few girls have in balls and parties, was in her way asserting the Rights of Man as unmistakably as the French revolutionists whose volcanic activity was of about the same compass of time as her literary industry. In her books the snob, not yet named or classified, is fully ascertained for the first time. Lady Catharine de Burgh in "Pride and Prejudice," John Dashwood in "Sense and Sensibility," Mr. Elton in "Emma," General Tilney in "Northanger Abbey," and above all Sir Walter Eliot in "Persuasion," are immortal types of insolence or meanness which foreshadow the kindred shapes of Thackeray's vaster snob-world, and fix the date when they began to be recognized and detested. But their recognition and detestation were only an incident of the larger circumstance studied in the different stories; and in "Persuasion" the snobbishness of Sir Walter

has little to do with the fortunes of his daughter Anne after the first unhappy moment of her broken engagement.

I

People will prefer Anne Eliot to Elizabeth Bennet according as they enjoy a gentle sufferance in women more than a lively rebellion; and it would not be profitable to try converting the worshippers of the one to the cult of the other. But without offence to either following, it may be maintained that "Persuasion" is imagined with as great novelty and daring as "Pride and Prejudice," and that Anne is as genuinely a heroine as Elizabeth.

In "Persuasion" Jane Austen made bold to take the case of a girl, neither weak nor ambitious, who lets the doubts and dislikes of her family and friends prevail with her, and gives up the man she loves because they think him beneath her in family and fortune. She yields because she is gentle and diffident of herself, and her indignant lover resents and despises her submission if he does not despise her. He is a young officer of the navy, rising to prominence in the service which was then giving England the supremacy of the seas, but he is not thought the equal of a daughter of such a baronet as Sir Walter Eliot. It is quite possible that in her portrayal of the odious situation Jane Austen avenges with personal satisfaction the new order against the old, for her brothers were of the navy, and the family hope and pride of the Austens were bound up with its glories. At any rate, when Sir Walter's debts oblige him to let Kellynch Hall, and live on a simple scale in Bath, it is a newly made admiral who becomes his tenant; and it is the brother of the admiral's wife who is Anne's rejected lover, and who now comes to visit his sister, full of vic-

tory and prize-money, with the avowed purpose of marrying and settling in life.

Seven years have passed since Frederick Wentworth angrily parted with Anne Eliot. They have never really ceased to love each other; but the effect has been very different with the active, successful man, and the quiet, dispirited girl. No longer in her first youth, she devotes herself to a little round of duties, principally in the family of her foolish, peevish younger sister; and finds her chief consolation in the friendship of the woman who so conscientiously urged her to her great mistake. The lovers meet in the Musgrove family into which Anne's sister has married, and Wentworth's fancy seems taken with one of the pretty daughters. Divers transparent devices are then employed rather to pique the reader's interest than to persuade him that the end is going to be other than what it must be. Nothing can be quite said to determine it among the things that happen; Wentworth and Anne simply live back into the mutual recognition of their love. He learns to know better her lovely and unselfish nature, and so far from having formally to forgive her, he prizes her the more for the very qualities which made their unhappiness possible. For her part, she has merely to own again the affection which has been a dull ache in her heart for seven years. Her father's pride is reconciled to her marriage, which is now with a somebody instead of the nobody Captain Wentworth once was. Sir Walter "was much struck with his personal claims, and felt that his superiority of appearance might not be unfairly balanced against her superiority of rank. . . . He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish, spendthrift baronet who had not principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him." As for Anne's mischievous, well-meaning friend who had urged her to

break with Wentworth before, "there was nothing less for Lady Russell to do than to admit that she had been completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and hopes."

II

This outline of the story gives no just sense of its quality, which resides mainly in its constancy to nature; and it gives no sufficient notion of the variety of character involved in the uneventful, quiet action. Anne's arrogant and selfish father, her cold-hearted, selfish elder sister, and her mean, silly, empty-headed younger sister, with the simple, kindly Musgrove family, form rather the witnesses than the persons of the drama, which transacts itself with the connivance rather than the participation of Sir Walter's heir-at-law, the clever, depraved and unscrupulous cousin, William Walter Eliot; Lady Russell, the ill-advised adviser of the broken engagement; the low-born, manœuvring Mrs. Clay, who all but captures the unwary Sir Walter; the frank, warm-hearted Admiral Crofts and his wife, and the whole sympathetic naval contingent at Lyme Regis. They brighten the reality of the picture, and form its atmosphere; they could not be spared, and yet, with the exception of Louisa Musgrove, who jumps from the sea-wall at Regis, and by her happy accident brings about the final understanding of the lovers, none of them actively contributes to the event, which for the most part accomplishes itself subjectively through the nature of Anne and Wentworth.

Of the two Anne is by far the more interesting and important personage; her story is distinctly the story of a heroine; yet never was there a heroine so little self-assertive, so far from forth-putting. When the book opens we find her neglected and contemned by her father

and elder sister, and sunken passively if not willingly into mere aunthood to her younger sister's children, with no friend who feels her value but that Lady Russell who has helped her to spoil her life. She goes to pay a long visit to her sister as soon as Kellynch Hall is taken by the Croftses, and it is in a characteristic moment of her usefulness there that Wentworth happens upon her, after their first cold and distant meeting before others.

The mother, as usual, had left a sick child to Anne's care, when "Captain Wentworth walked into the drawing-room at the Cottage, where were only herself and the little invalid Charles, who was lying on the sofa. . . . He started, and could only say, 'I thought the Miss Musgroves had been here; Mrs. Musgrove told me I should find them here,' before he walked to the window to recollect himself, and feel how he ought to behave. 'They are up-stairs with my sister; they will be down in a few minutes, I dare say,' had been Anne's reply in all the confusion that was natural; and if the child had not called to her to come and do something for him, she would have been out of the room the next moment, and released Captain Wentworth as well as herself. He continued at the window, and after calmly and politely saying, 'I hope the little boy is better,' was silent. She was obliged to kneel by the sofa, and remain there to satisfy her patient, and thus they continued a few minutes, when, to her very great satisfaction, she heard some other person crossing the vestibule. It proved to be Charles Hayter," who supposes Wentworth to be his rival for one of the Miss Musgroves. He seats himself, and takes up a newspaper, ignoring Wentworth's willingness to talk. "Another minute brought another addition. The younger boy, a remarkably stout, forward child of two years old, having got the door opened, made his determined appearance among them, and went straight to the sofa to see what was going on, and

put in his claim to anything good that might be given away. There being nothing to eat, he could only have some play, and as his aunt would not let him tease his sick brother, he began to fasten himself upon her, as she knelt, in a way that, busy as she was about Charles, she could not shake him off. She spoke to him, ordered, insisted, and entreated in vain. Once she did contrive to push him away, but the boy had the greater pleasure in getting upon her back again directly. 'Walter,' said she, 'get down this moment. You are extremely troublesome. I am very angry with you.' 'Walter,' cried Charles Hayter, 'why do you not do as you are bid? . . . Come to me, Walter.' But not a bit did Walter stir. In another moment she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much that his sturdy little hands were unfastened from around her neck and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it. . . . She could not even thank him. She could only hang over little Charles with most disordered feelings . . . with the conviction soon forced upon her by the noise he was studiously making with the child, that he meant to avoid hearing her thanks . . . till enabled by the entrance of Mary and the Miss Musgroves to make over her patient to their care and leave the room. She could not stay. . . . She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous, and of being overcome by such a trifle; but so it was, and it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her."

III

As any practised reader of fiction could easily demonstrate, this is not the sort of rescue to bring about a reconciliation between lovers in a *true* novel. There it

"'WALTER,' SAID SHE, 'GET DOWN THIS MOMENT'"

must be something more formidable than a naughty little boy that the heroine is saved from: it must be a deadly miscreant, or a mad bull, or a frightened horse, or an express train, or a sinking ship. Still it cannot be denied that this simple, this homely scene, is very pretty, and is very like things that happen in life, where there is reason to think love is oftener shown in quality than quantity, and does its effect as perfectly in the little as in the great events. Even the most tremendous incident of the book, the famous passage which made Tennyson, when he visited Lyme Regis, wish to see first of all the place where Louisa Musgrove fell from the Cobb, has hardly heroic proportions, though it is of greater intensity in its lifelikeness, and it reverses the relations of Anne and Wentworth in the characters of helper and helped.

"There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and safely down the steep steps excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. . . . She was safely down, and instantly to shew her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in vain, she smiled and said, 'I am determined I will': he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second; she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! There was no wound, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death. . . . Captain Wentworth, who had caught her up, knelt with her in his arms, looking on her with a face as pallid as her own in an agony of silence. 'She is dead!' screamed Mary, catching hold of her husband, and contributing with her own horror to make him immovable; and in the same moment,

Henrietta, sinking under the conviction, lost her senses, too, and would have fallen on the steps, but for Captain Benwick and Anne, who supported her between them. 'Is there no one to help me?' were the first words that burst from Captain Wentworth. 'Go to him; go to him,' cried Anne; 'for Heaven's sake, go to him. Leave me and go to him. Rub her hands, rub her temples; here are salts; take them, take them.' Louisa was raised up and supported between them. Everything was done that Anne had prompted, but in vain; while Captain Wentworth, staggering against the wall for his support, exclaimed in the bitterest agony, 'Oh, God! Her father and mother!' 'A surgeon!' said Anne. He caught at the word; it seemed to rouse him at once; and saying only, 'True, true; a surgeon this instant.' . . . Anne, attending with all the strength and zeal and thought, which instinct supplied, to Henrietta, still tried, at intervals, to suggest comfort to the others, tried to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth. Both seemed to look to her for direction. 'Anne, Anne,' cried Charles, 'what in Heaven's name is to be done next?' Captain Wentworth's eyes were also turned towards her. 'Had she not better be carried to the inn? Yes, I am sure; carry her to the inn.' 'Yes, yes, to the inn,' repeated Wentworth. . . . 'I will carry her myself.'"

Anne has to show, with all this presence of mind, a greatness of mind superior to the misery of imagining that Wentworth is in love with Louisa, and that his impassioned remorse is an expression of his love. Only when they are going home together, to tell Louisa's parents of the accident, does she make one meek little tacit reflection in her own behalf. "'Don't talk of it, don't talk of it,' he cried. 'Oh, God, that I had not given way to her at that fatal moment! Had I done as I ought! But so eager and so resolute! Dear, sweet

Louisa!' Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character. . . . She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favor of happiness as a very resolute character."

IV

One of the things that Jane Austen was first in was the personal description of her heroines. Almost to her time the appearance of the different characters was left to the reader's imagination; it is only in the modern novel that the author seems to feel it his duty to tell how his people look. We have seen how meagrely and formally the heroines of "The Vicar of Wakefield" are presented. In "Sir Charles Grandison," there is a great pretence of describing the beauty of Harriet Byron, but the image given is vague and conventional. So far as I recall them, the looks of Fanny Burney's and Maria Edgeworth's heroines are left to the reader's liking; and I do not remember any portrait even of Elizabeth Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice." It is in her later stories that Jane Austen offers this proof of modernity among so many other proofs of it, and tells us how her girls appeared to her. She tells us not very elaborately, to be sure, though in the case of Emma Woodhouse, in "Emma," the picture is quite finished. In "Persuasion" Anne Eliot is slightly sketched; and we must be content with the fact that she had "mild dark eyes and delicate features," and that at the time we are introduced to her she fully looked her twenty-seven years. But this is a good deal better than nothing, and in "Northanger Abbey" Catharine Morland is still more tangibly presented. "The Morlands . . . were in general very plain, and Catharine was, for many years of her life, as plain as any.

She had a thin, awkward figure, a sallow skin without color, dark lank hair, and strong features. . . . At fifteen, appearances were mending. . . . Her complexion improved, her features were softened by plumpness and color, her eyes gained more animation, and her figure more consequence." At seventeen, when we make her acquaintance, her manners were "just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and when in good looks, pretty."

These particulars are from that delightful first chapter where the character as well as the person of the heroine is studied with the playful irony in which the whole story is conceived. From the beginning we know that it is a comedy the author has in hand; and we lose sight of her obvious purpose of satirizing the Radcliffe school of romance in our delight with the character of the heroine and her adventures in Bath and at Northanger Abbey. Catharine Morland is a goose, but a very engaging goose, and a goose you must respect for her sincerity, her high principles, her generous trust of others, and her patience under trials that would be great for much stronger heads. It is no wonder that the accomplished Henry Tilney falls in love with her when he finds that she is already a little in love with him; and when his father brutally sends her home from the Abbey where he has pressed her to visit his daughter on the belief that she is rich and will be a good match for his son, it is no wonder that Tilney follows her and offers himself to her. She prevails by her innocence and sweetness, and in spite of her romantic folly she has so much good heart that it serves her in place of good sense.

V

The chapters of the story relating to Catharine's stay at the Abbey are rather perfunctorily devoted to bur-

CATHARINE MORLAND

lesquing romantic fiction, in accordance with the author's original design, and they have not the easy charm of the scenes at Bath, where Catharine, as the guest of Mrs. Allen, meets Henry Tilney at a public ball. "Mrs. Allen was one of that numerous class of females whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. . . . The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man like Mr. Allen. In one respect she was admirably fitted to introduce a young lady into public, being as fond of going everywhere, and seeing everything herself, as any young lady could." But at the first ball she knows nobody, and she can only say to Catharine from time to time, "I wish we had a large acquaintance here," but at their next appearance in the Lower Rooms (how much the words say to the reader of old-fashioned fiction!) the master of ceremonies introduces a partner to Catharine. "His name was Tilney. He seemed to be about four or five and twenty, was rather tall, had a pleasing countenance, a very lively and intelligent eye, and, if not quite handsome, was very near it. . . . When they were seated at tea she found him as agreeable as she had already given him credit for being. . . . After chatting for some time on such matters as naturally arose from the objects around them, he suddenly addressed her with—'I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath, whether you were ever here before, whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert, and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent; but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are, I will begin

directly.' 'You need not give yourself that trouble, sir.' 'No trouble, I assure you, madam.' Then, forming his features in a soft smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added with a simpering air, 'Have you been long in Bath, madam?' 'About a week, sir,' replied Catharine, trying not to laugh. 'Really!' with affected astonishment. 'Why should you be surprised, sir?' 'Why, indeed?' said he in his natural tone. 'But some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable, than any other. Now let us go on. Were you ever here before, madam?' 'Never, sir.' 'Indeed! Have you yet honored the Upper Rooms?' 'Yes, sir; I was there last Monday.' 'Have you been to the theatre?' 'Yes, sir; I was at the play on Tuesday.' 'To the concert?' 'Yes, sir; on Wednesday.' 'And you are altogether pleased with Bath?' 'Yes, I like it very well.' 'Now, I must give one more smirk, and then we may be rational again.' Catharine turned away her head, not knowing whether she ought venture to laugh. 'I see what you think of me,' said he gravely. 'I shall make but a poor figure in your journal to-morrow. . . . I know exactly what you will say. Friday went to the Lower Rooms; wore my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings, plain black shoes; appeared to much advantage, but was strangely harassed by a queer, half-witted man who would make me dance with him, and distressed me by his nonsense.' 'Indeed I shall say no such thing.' 'Shall I tell you what you ought to say?' 'If you please.' 'I danced with a very agreeable young man, had a good deal of conversation with him, seems a most extraordinary genius; hope I may know more of him. *That*, madam, is what I *wish* you to say.' 'But perhaps I keep no journal.' 'Perhaps you are not sitting in this room, and I am not sitting beside you.'"

It is plain from the beginning what must be Catharine's fate with a young man who can laugh at her so caressingly, and what must be his with a girl so helplessly transparent to his eyes. Henry Tilney is as good as he is subtle, and he knows how to value her wholesome honesty aright; but all her friends are not witty young clergymen, and one of them is as little like him in appreciation of Catharine's rare nature as she is like Catharine in the qualities which take him. This is putting it rather too severely if it conveys the reproach of wilful bad faith in the case of Isabella Thorp, who becomes the bosom friend of Catharine at a moment's notice, and the betrothed of Catharine's brother with very little more delay. She is simply what she was born, a self-centred jilt in every motion of her being, and not to be blamed for fulfilling the jilt's function in a world where she is divined in almost her modern importance. In this character, the author forecasts the supremacy of a type which had scarcely been recognized before, but which has since played so dominant a part in fiction, and as with the several types of snobs, proves herself not only artist but prophet. Isabella is not of the lineage of the high and mighty flirts, the dark and deadly flirts, who deal destruction round among the hearts of men. She is what was known in her time as a "rattle"; her tongue runs while her eyes fly, and her charms are perpetually alert for admiration. She is involved in an incessant drama of fictitious occurrences; she is as romantic in her own way as Catharine is in hers; she peoples an unreal world with conquests, while Catharine dwells in the devotion of one true, if quite imaginary lover. As Catharine cannot make anything of such a character, she decides to love and believe in her utterly, and she cannot well do more after Isabella becomes engaged to her brother James, and declares that she is going to withdraw from the

world in his absence, and vows that though she may go to the assembly she will do it merely because Catharine asks it. "'But do not insist upon my being very agreeable, for my heart you know will be forty miles off; and as for dancing, do not mention it, I beg; *that* is quite out of the question.'"

Catharine takes her friend so literally that when Tilney asks her in behalf of his handsome brother the question whether Miss Thorp would have any objection to dancing, "'Your brother will not mind it, I know,' said she, 'because I heard him say before that he hated dancing; but it was very good-natured of him to think of it. I suppose he saw Isabella sitting down, and fancied she might wish for a partner, but . . . she would not dance on any account in the world.' Henry smiled and said, 'How very little trouble it can give you to understand the motive of other people's actions.' 'Why, what do you mean?' . . . 'I only meant that your attributing my brother's wish of dancing with Miss Thorp to good-nature, convinced me of your being superior in good-nature yourself to all the rest of the world.' Catharine blushed and disclaimed. . . . She drew back for some time, forgetting to speak or to listen . . . till roused by the voice of Isabella, she looked up and saw her with Captain Tilney preparing to give their hands across. Isabella shrugged her shoulders and smiled, the only explanation of this extraordinary change which could at that time be given. Catharine . . . spoke her astonishment in very plain terms to her partner. 'I cannot think how it could happen. Isabella was so determined not to dance.' 'And did Isabella never change her mind before?' 'Oh! but because—and your brother! After what you told him from me, how could he think of going to ask her?' . . . 'The fairness of your friend was an open attraction; her firmness, you know, could only be under-

HENRY TILNEY

stood by yourself.' 'You are laughing; but I assure you Isabella is very firm in general.' . . . The friends were not able to get together . . . till after the dancing was over; but then as they walked about the room arm in arm, Isabella thus explained herself: 'I do not wonder at your surprise, and I am really fatigued to death. . . . I would have given the world to sit still.' 'Then why did not you?' . . . 'Oh, my dear, it would have looked so particular, and you know how I abhor doing that. . . . You have no idea how he pressed me. . . . I found there would be no peace if I did not stand up. Besides, I thought Mrs. Hughes, who introduced him, might take it ill if I did; and your dear brother, I am sure, would have been miserable if I had sat down the whole evening. My spirits are quite jaded, listening to his nonsense; and then being such a smart young fellow, I saw every eye was upon us.' 'He is very handsome indeed.' 'Handsome? Yes, I suppose he may . . . But he is not at all in my style of beauty. I hate a florid complexion and dark eyes in a man. However, he is very well. Amazingly conceited, I am sure. I took him down, several times, you know, in my way.'"

The born jilt, the jilt so natured that the part she perpetually plays is as unconscious with her as the circulation of the blood, has never been more perfectly presented than in Isabella Thorp, in whom she was first presented; and her whole family, so thoroughly false that they live in an atmosphere of lies, are miracles of art. The soft, kindly, really well-meaning mother, is as great a liar as her hollow-hearted, hollow-headed daughter, or her braggart son who babbles blasphemous falsehoods because they are his native speech, with only the purpose of a momentary effect, and hardly the hope or wish of deceit. His pursuit of the trusting Catharine, who desires to believe in him as the friend of her brother

is the fa ical element of the pretty comedy. The farce darkens ı ıto as much tragedy as the scheme will suffer when Ge eral Tilney, a liar in his own way, is taken in by John Thorp's talk, and believes her very rich; but it all bri htens into the sweetest and loveliest comedy again, when Henry Tilney follows her home from his father's house, and the cheerful scene is not again eclipsed till the curtain goes down upon her radiant happiness.

JANE AUSTEN'S EMMA WOODHOUSE, MARIANNE DASHWOOD, AND FANNY PRICE

IN primitive fiction plot is more important than character; as the art advances character becomes the chief interest, and the action is such as springs from it. In the old tales and romances there is no such thing as character in the modern sense; their readers were satisfied with what the heroes and heroines did and suffered.

When the desire for character arose, the novelists loaded their types with attributes; but still there was no character, which is rooted in personality. The novelist of to-day who has not conceived of this is as archaic as any romancer of the Middle Ages in his ideal of art. Most of the novels printed in the last year, in fact, are as crudely devised as those which have amused people of childish imagination at any time in the last thousand years; and it will always be so with most novels, because most people are of childish imagination. The masterpieces in fiction are those which delight the mind with the traits of personality, with human nature recognizable by the reader through its truth to himself.

The wonder of Jane Austen is that at a time when even the best fiction was overloaded with incident, and its types went staggering about under the attributes heaped upon them, she imagined getting on with only so much incident as would suffice to let her characters express their natures movingly or amusingly. She seems to have reached this really unsurpassable degree of per-

fection without a formulated philosophy, and merely by her clear vision of the true relation of art to life; but however she came to be what she was, she was so unquestionably great, so unmistakably the norm and prophecy of most that is excellent in Anglo-Saxon fiction since her time, that I shall make no excuse for what may seem a disproportionate study of her heroines.

I

Emma Woodhouse, in the story named after her, is one of the most boldly imagined of Jane Austen's heroines. Perhaps she is the very most so, for it took supreme courage to portray a girl, meant to win and keep the reader's fancy, with the characteristics frankly ascribed to Emma Woodhouse. We are indeed allowed to know that she is pretty; not formally, but casually, from the words of a partial friend: "Such an eye!—the true hazel eye—and so brilliant!—regular features, open countenance, with a complexion—ah, what a bloom of full health, and such a pretty height and size; such a firm and upright figure." But, before we are allowed to see her personal beauty we are made to see in her some of the qualities which are the destined source of trouble for herself and her friends. In her wish to be useful she is patronizing and a little presumptuous; her self-sufficiency early appears, and there are hints of her willingness to shape the future of others without having past enough of her own to enable her to do it judiciously. The man who afterwards marries her says of her: "'She will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding. . . . Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family. At ten years old she had the misfortune of being able to answer questions which puzzled her sister

at seventeen. She was always quick and assured . . . and ever since she was twelve Emma has been mistress of the house and you all.'"

An officious and self-confident girl, even if pretty, is not usually one to take the fancy, and yet Emma takes the fancy. She manages the delightful and whimsical old invalid her father, but she is devotedly and unselfishly good to him. She takes the destiny of Harriet Smith unwarrantably into her charge, but she breaks off the girl's love-affair only in the interest of a better match. She decides that Frank Churchill, the stepson of her former governess, will be in love with her, but she never dreams that Mr. Elton, whom she means for Harriet Smith, can be so. She is not above a little manœuvring for the advantage of those she wishes to serve, but the tacit insincerity of Churchill is intolerable to her. She is unfeelingly neglectful of Jane Fairfax and cruelly suspicious of her, but she generously does what she can to repair the wrong, and she takes her punishment for it meekly and contritely. She makes thoughtless and heartless fun of poor, babbling Miss Bates, but when Knightley calls her to account for it, she repents her unkindness with bitter tears. She will not be advised against her pragmatical schemes by Knightley, but she is humbly anxious for his good opinion. She is charming in the very degree of her feminine complexity, which is finally an endearing single-heartedness.

Her character is shown in an action so slight that the novel of "Emma" may be said to be hardly more than an exemplification of Emma. In the placid circumstance of English country life where she is the principal social figure the story makes its round with a few events so unexciting as to leave the reader in doubt whether anything at all has happened. Mr. Elton, a clerical snob as odious as Mr. Collins in "Pride and Prejudice" is amusing, indignantly resents Emma's plan for supply-

ing him with a wife in Harriet Smith, and marries a woman who has Emma's defects without their qualities. Frank Churchill keeps his engagement with Jane Fairfax a secret till all the possible mischief can come from it, and then acknowledges it just when the fact must be most mortifying and humiliating to Emma. After she has been put to shame before Knightley in every way, she finds herself beloved and honored by him and in the way to be happily married. There are, meantime, a few dances and picnics, dinners and teas; Harriet Smith is frightened by gypsies, and some hen-roosts are robbed. There is not an accident, even of the mild and beneficent type of Louisa Musgrove's in "Persuasion"; there is not an elopement, even of the *bouffe* nature of Lydia's in "Pride and Prejudice"; there is nothing at all so tragic as Catharine Morland's expulsion by General Tilney in "Northanger Abbey." Duels and abductions, of course, there are none; for Jane Austen had put from her all the machinery of the great and little novelists of the eighteenth century, and openly mocked at it. This has not prevented its being frequently used since, and she shows herself more modern than all her predecessors and contemporaries and most of her successors, in the rejection of the major means and the employment of the minor means to produce the enduring effects of "Emma." Among her quiet books it is almost the quietest, and so far as the novel can suggest that repose which is the ideal of art "Emma" suggests it, in an action of unsurpassed unity, consequence, and simplicity.

It is difficult to detach from the drama any scene which shall present Emma in a moment more characteristic than other moments; but that in which Knightley takes her to task for her behavior to Miss Bates can be chosen, because it illustrates the courageous naturalness with which she is studied throughout. "While waiting for

"EMMA, I MUST ONCE MORE SPEAK TO YOU"

the carriage, she found Mr. Knightley at her side. He looked around, as if to see that no one were near, and then said, 'Emma, I must once more speak to you as I have been used to do. . . . I cannot see you acting wrong without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? Emma, I had not thought it possible!' Emma recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off. 'Nay, how could I have helped saying what I did? Nobody could have helped it. It was not so very bad. I dare say she did not understand me.' 'I assure you she did. She felt your full meaning. She has talked of it since. I wish you could have heard how she talked of it—with what candor and generosity. I wish you could have heard her honoring your forbearance . . . when her society must be so irksome.' 'Oh,' cried Emma, 'I know there is not a better creature in the world; but you must allow that what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in her.' 'They are blended, I acknowledge,' he said, 'and were . . . she a woman of fortune, I would leave her every harmless absurdity to take its chance. . . . Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case! She is poor; she is sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she should live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed! You, whom she had known from an infant, whom she had seen grow up from a period when her notice was an honor—to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece, too—and before many others, many of whom (certainly some) would be entirely guided by your treatment of her. This is not pleasant to you, Emma, and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I

must, I will—I will tell you truths while I can . . . trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now.' While they talked, they were advancing towards the carriage; it was ready, and before she could speak again he had handed her in. He had misinterpreted the feelings which had kept her face averted and her tongue motionless. They were combined only of anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern. She had not been able to speak, and on entering the carriage, sunk back for a moment overcome; then reproaching herself for having taken no leave, making no acknowledgment, parting in apparent sullenness, she looked out with voice and hand eager to show a difference; but it was too late. He had turned away, and the horses were in motion. . . . Emma felt the tears running down her cheeks almost all the way home, without being at any trouble to check them, extraordinary as they were."

It is not on such grounds, in such terms, that a heroine is often talked to in a novel, and it is not so that she commonly takes a talking-to. But it is to be remembered that Knightley is not only Emma's tacit lover; he is the brother of her sister's husband, and much her own elder, and as a family friend has some right to scold her. It is to be considered also that she is herself a singular type among heroines: a type which Jane Austen perfected if she did not invent, and in that varied sisterhood she has the distinction, if not the advantage, of being an entirely natural girl, and a nice girl, in spite of her faults.

II

"Sense and Sensibility" is the most conventional, the most mechanical of the author's novels. The title,

like that of "Pride and Prejudice," implies the task of developing two opposite characters in the antithesis which suggests itself; but Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are contrasted much more directly and obviously than Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. These, indeed, are often interchangeably proud and prejudiced; but Elinor is always a person of sense, and Marianne is always a person of sensibility. One sister always looks the facts of life in the face; the other always sees them through a cloud of romantic emotions. It is not pretended that the wise virgin escapes suffering any more than the foolish, and so far the novel attests itself the effect of Jane Austen's clear perception and faithful observation. It abounds in the truth and courage which distinguish everything she did, and it is perhaps more humorously just and more unsparingly exigent of true ideals than some other books of hers. But it is built more than her other books upon the lines of the accepted fiction of her time, or of the times before hers. In the affair of Marianne's false-hearted lover Willoughby there is almost a reversion to the novel in which young men habitually sought the love of trusting girls and betrayed it. It was in fact her earliest novel and she first wrote it in the form of letters. Then, after she had practised her 'prentice hand to mastery in "Pride and Prejudice," she recast "Sense and Sensibility" in its present shape. It is only inferior to her other novels; compared with most of the novels that had gone before hers, this least of Jane Austen's is a masterpiece; and the romantic Marianne, even more than the matter-of-fact Elinor, is a picture of girlhood touched in with tender truth, and with the caressing irony which still leaves the character pleasing.

The story is distinctively modern in giving a description of the sister heroines, which was probably an afterthought, and occurred to the author in the making

over. "Miss Dashwood," she says, "had a delicate complexion, regular features, and a remarkably pretty figure. Marianne was still handsomer. Her form, though not so correct as her sister's, in having the advantage of height, was more striking. . . . Her skin was very brown, but from its transparency, her complexion was uncommonly brilliant; her features were all good; her smile sweet and attractive, and in her eyes, which were very dark, there was a life, a spirit, an eagerness, which could hardly be seen without delight." Marianne's mother is as romantic as the girl herself, and it is by her connivance that the girl thinks it a kind of merit to be a credulous simpleton, and to believe more in the love of the cruel scoundrel who flatters and jilts her than he openly asks her to do. When she finds herself in London, shortly after their parting in the country with all the forms of tacit devotion, on his part, and he snubs her at their first meeting in society, she owns in her shame and grief, that there has been no engagement. "'It was every day implied, but never professedly declared. Sometimes I thought it had been—but it never was.' Yet with a faith in his unplighted truth as absolute as the sense of her own loyalty to him, she would have been ready to seize upon him, and claim all his remembered tenderness, if her sister had not prevented her.

"'Good Heaven!' she exclaimed, 'he is there, he is there! Oh! why does he not look at me? Why cannot I speak to him?' 'Pray, pray, be composed,' cried Elinor, 'and do not betray what you feel to every one present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet.' This, however, was more than she could believe herself, and to be composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach of Marianne, it was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience that affected every feature. At last he turned round again, and regarded them both;

"'WILL YOU NOT SHAKE HANDS WITH ME?'"

she started up, and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to him. He approached, and, addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, inquired in a hurried manner after Mrs. Dashwood, and asked how long they had been in town. Elinor was robbed of all presence of mind by such an address. . . . The feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. . . . 'Good God, Willoughby! what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?' He could not then avoid it, but her touch seemed painful to him, and he held her hand only for a moment. 'I did myself the honor of calling in Berkeley Street, last Tuesday. . . . My card was not lost, I hope?' 'But have you not received my notes?' cried Marianne, in the wildest anxiety. . . . 'Tell me, Willoughby—for Heaven's sake, tell me, what is the matter?' He made no reply; his complexion changed, and all his embarrassment returned; but as if, on catching the eye of the young lady with whom he had been previously talking, he felt the necessity of instant exertion, he recovered himself again, and after saying, 'Yes, I had the pleasure of receiving the information of your arrival in town, which you were so good as to send me,' turned hastily away with a slight bow, and joined his friend. Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair. . . . 'Go to him, Elinor,' she said, as soon as she could speak, 'and force him to come to me. . . . I cannot rest, I cannot have a moment's peace, till this is explained—some dreadful misapprehension or other. Oh, go to him this moment.' 'How can that be done? No, my dearest Marianne, you must wait. This is not a place for explanations' . . . Marianne continued incessantly to give way . . . in exclamations of wretchedness. In a short time Elinor saw Willoughby quit the room . . . and telling Marianne that he

was gone, urged the impossibility of speaking to him again that evening."

III

In an earlier age of fiction, if not of society, the folly of Marianne would have meant her ruin; but in the wiser and milder æsthetics of Jane Austen it meant merely her present heart-break, with her final happiness through a worthier love. Hers is a very simple nature, studied with a simpler art than such an intricate character as Emma's. She has only at all times to be herself, responsive to her mainspring of emotionality; and a girl like Emma has apparently to be different people at different times, in obedience to inconsistent and unexpected impulses. She is therefore perhaps the greatest of Jane Austen's creations, and certainly the most modern; yet even so slight and elemental a character as Marianne is handled with the security and mastery, which were sometimes greater and sometimes less in the author's work.

"Persuasion," which was the latest of her novels, is in places the poorest, and "Sense and Sensibility," which is, on the whole, the poorest, has moments of being the greatest. There is no such meanness portrayed in all fiction as John Dashwood's, and yet you are made to feel that he would like not to be mean if only he could once rise above himself. In Marianne and her mother, who are such a pair of emotional simpletons, there are traits of generosity that almost redeem their folly, and their limitations in the direction of silliness are as distinctly shown as their excesses. Willoughby himself, who lives to realize that he has never loved any one but Marianne, and has been given to understand by the relation who leaves her money away from him, "that if he had behaved with honor towards Marianne, he

might at once have been happy and rich," even he is not committed wholesale to unavailing regret. "That his repentance of misconduct, which thus brought its own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted. . . . But that he was forever inconsolable—that he fled from society, or contracted a habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart—must not be depended upon, for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humor, nor his house always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity."

It was not Jane Austen's way to do anything wholesale; she was far too well acquainted with life, and of too sensitive an artistic conscience for that; and especially in "Mansfield Park" is one aware of the hand that is held from overdoing. As in "Sense and Sensibility," and in fact all her other novels, the subordinate characters are of delightful verity and vitality. Mrs. Norris is of a meanness which in its sort may almost match with John Dashwood's, and Lady Bertram's indolent affections and principles form a personality of almost unique charm. These sisters of Mrs. Price who made an unhappy love marriage beneath her, are of the same quality as she, and their differentiation by environment is one of the subtle triumphs of the author's art.

It is by the same skill that a character so prevalently passive as that of sweet Fanny Price is made insensibly to take and gently to keep the hold of a heroine upon the reader. It would have been so easy in so many ways to overdo her. But she is never once overdone, either when as a child she meets with the cold welcome of charity in her uncle's family, where she afterwards makes herself indispensable, or in her return to her childhood home, which has forgotten her in her long absence. It is not pretended that she is treated by her

cousins and her aunts with active unkindness, and she suffers none of the crueller snubbing which cheaply wins a heroine the heart of the witness. When she goes back to Portsmouth on that famous visit, after nine years at Mansfield Park, it is not concealed that she is ashamed of her home, of her weak and slattern mother, of her drinky, smoky, and sweary father, of her rude little brothers and sisters, of the whole shabby and vulgar household. None of the younger children remember her; her father and mother, from moment to moment, in their preoccupation with her brother, who comes with her to get his ship at Portsmouth (we are again among naval people), fail to remember her. All the circumstances are conducive to disgust and resentment in a girl who might reasonably have expected to be a distinguished guest for a while at least. But once more that delicately discriminating hand of Jane Austen does its work; it presently appears that the Price household is not so altogether impossible, and that a girl who wishes to be of use to others is not condemned to lasting misery and disgrace in any circumstances. Always the humorous sense of limitations comes in, but the human sense of good-will is there; the recognition of the effect of good-will is distinct but not elaborate. There is more philosophizing and satirizing than would be present in a more recent novel of equal mastery; but the characterization is as net as in the highest art of any time.

Sweet Fanny Price goes back to Mansfield Park with almost as little notice from her family as when she came to Portsmouth; but she has done them good, and is the better and stronger for her unrequited self-devotion. It is not pretended that she takes any active part in supporting the family at Mansfield Park under the disgrace which has befallen them through the elopement of one daughter to be divorced and of another to be

married. Her function is best suggested by the exclamation with which her aunt Bertram falls upon her neck, "Dear Fanny, now I shall be comfortable." To be a comfort, that has always been Fanny Price's rare privilege, and she imparts to the reader something of the consolation she brings to all the people in the story who need the help of her sympathy. Possibly there was never a heroine, except Anne Eliot, who was so passive, without being spectacularly passive, if it is permitted so to phrase the rather intangible fact; and yet who so endeared herself to the fancy.

One is not passionately in love with Fanny Price, as one is with some heroines; one is quite willing Edward Bertram should have her in the end; but she is one of the sweetest and dearest girls in the world, though these words, too, rather oversay her. She is another proof of Jane Austen's constant courage, which was also her constant wisdom, in being true to life. It is not only wit like Elizabeth Bennet's, sensibility like Marianne Dashwood's, complexity like Emma Woodhouse's, or utter innocence like Catharine Morland's that is charming. Goodness is charming, patience, usefulness, forbearance, meekness, are charming, as Jane Austen divined in such contrasting types as Fanny Price and Anne Eliot. If any young lady has a mind to be like them, she can learn how in two of the most interesting books in the world.

Some of the old English novels were amazing successes even when compared with the most worthless novels of recent days. "Pamela," and "Clarissa," and "Sir Charles Grandison" were read all over the Continent. The "Vicar of Wakefield" was the gospel of a new art to Germany, where Goethe said that it permanently influenced his character. "Evelina" and "Cecilia" were the passions of people of taste everywhere, and when their trembling author was presented

to Louis XVIII. in Paris, he complimented her upon her novels, which were known also to the first Napoleon. No such glories attended Jane Austen in her lifetime. She found with difficulty a publisher for her greatest book, and a public quite as slow and reluctant. But her publishers and her public have been increasing ever since, and they were never so numerous as now. Whether they will ever be fewer, it would be useless to ask; what we know without asking, from the evidence of her work, is [illegible] qualities of greatness she is still the n[illegible] her contemporaries, of nearly all her su[illegible]

HEROINES OF MISS FERRIER, MRS. OPIE, AND MRS. RADCLIFFE

DE FOE, Richardson, Goldsmith, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen: this is the lineage of the English fiction whose ideal is reality, whose prototype is nature. To this illustrious company there are others worthy to be added, especially that Miss Susan Edmondstone Ferrier, who wrote "Marriage," "Inheritance," and "Destiny," and whom Scott praised with his habitual generosity, and grouped with Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen, as having "given portraits of real society far superior to anything" men had attempted. The more voluminous Mrs. Amelia Opie may be named with the others for the effect of nature which she secondarily achieved in her characters when primarily seeking the improvement of her readers. She was extolled by the highest criticism in the first quarter of the century for qualities that do not now appeal from her novels, but many of her tales can still be read with amusement, and with a sense of the helpless allegiance to life which her hyperethicized art could not withhold.

I

I do not know what measure of favor the recent London and Boston editions of Miss Ferrier's novels have met with; but I think the reader can find an uncommon pleasure in them if he will first thoroughly advise him-

self that they are no such works of art as Jane Austen's stories. Miss Ferrier was one who caricatured and satirized and moralized; and yet her fiction is largely true, with delightful instances in which it is altogether true. In fact, any author who aims at truth to his own knowledge of what is just and right, can hardly fail of truth in portraying life. His conscience governs him in his art, his conscience becomes his art; and the two work together to an issue at once ethical and æsthetic.

Nearly every character in "Marriage," which we may agree upon for the time as Miss Ferrier's best story, has some touch of the amusing eccentricity, the lawless originality, which afterwards in much eviller times developed into the excesses of Dickensosity. But her people are not merely eccentrics or originals; and one remembers them for their qualities as well as for their singularities. Lady Juliana Courtland, who makes a runaway match with Henry Douglas, and who, when cast off by her father, goes with her lapdogs and parrots to find a home with her husband's family in the Scotch Highlands, is only a superaccentuated expression of the weak, shallow, persistent selfishness of which the best society in all times and countries offers abundant examples. But she is skilfully differenced from other examples of the kind, and she passes through the story quite visibly and tangibly. The three old-maid sisters of the laird of Glenfern are eccentrics, without the inconsistency which distinguishes characters; they are as infallibly themselves as so many lunatics. Their devoutly admired Lady MacLaughlin, with her medicines and all her maxims, is also a type, inflexibly consistent, but capable of variation from her rude prepotence, in favor of the supercilious triviality of the English earl's daughter, who promptly tramples the obsequious pride of the poor ladies of Glenfern under her silk-shod feet. She is a true aristocrat in the unfailing assertion of her

superiority, and they are true aristocrats in their acknowledgment of it. When her captivity in the abhorred Highlands comes to an end through the good offices of that old friend of her husband's who manages Douglas's recall to his regiment, and makes him an allowance, she gladly leaves one of her twin daughters behind her with the sister-in-law who adopts it; and with insolent exultation before her husband's family, she goes back to the spendthrift life in London from which her mistaken love-marriage had exiled her. She is studied in bold black and white; and there is little shading used or needed in the portrayal of her growth from a selfish young woman of fashion into a selfish old woman of fashion.

One of the prime virtues with which an aristocracy supplies itself at the expense of the lower classes is frankness; and the frankness with which Lady Juliana and all her noble family discover their good and bad traits is shown with perhaps more mastery than anything else in the story. Her niece, Lady Emily, is rather a pleasing accident of the kindly patrician wilfulness, such as Thackeray was fond of imagining; but neither she nor Lady Juliana's spoiled daughter Adelaide, nor her neglected daughter Mary, is the heroine of "Marriage." That is always Lady Juliana herself, who grudges letting Mary come to her for a few months, when the girl's health is failing in Scotland, as shamelessly as she refuses following her husband to India when his regiment is ordered away. She has never in her whole selfish life had a doubt of her right to the things she enjoys wasting, and has never had a regret except for a pleasure she has missed. She grows older very naturally; her caprice becomes obstinacy, her wilfulness severity, her levity foolishness; she screeches, she scolds, she makes herself a bore and a nuisance. She is truly the incarnation of the mere-

tricious spirit, and her instinct is to spoil and devour, to crave and to grudge.

II

Lady Juliana is as amusingly a warning as Emma Castlemain in Mrs. Opie's "Temper" is intolerably an example. Few young women in fiction have been so offensively good, have had so few moments of passive virtue in which the reader could cease longing for their extirpation. It would be almost as hard to match her for the complications of her origin and destiny. She advances through the story, with a cloud upon the question of her mother's marriage which is lifted just in season to prevent her own marriage with her half-brother; and all this in no obscure lands or times, but in England and France, at such a recent date that she narrowly misses seeing the First Consul review his troops before the Tuileries. A foreign sojourn and an atmosphere of contemporaneous history seem to be necessary, in the author's view, to the development of a heroine who might have shown herself a prig, alternately sentimental and sarcastic, in far less formidable circumstances; but it cannot be honestly said that the political actualities are entertainingly employed in the story of Emma's love-affairs. As far as this story is an illustration of the social spirit of the first decade of the century, it fails to convey any hint of that revolt which stirs in Jane Austen's novels. In "Temper" there are some wicked people of good birth; but all the contemptible people are middle class or lower class. People in trade, or rich from trade, are invariably vulgar, as they are in "Evelina" and "Camilla" and "Cecilia," and there is no recognition of snobbery, because for that time, at least, the author is a snob, as dear Fanny Burney was apparently at all times.

The story is worth while chiefly as an instance of the prevailing literary tendency. It bears, in motive and object, an allegiance to the great school of nature which had flourished from the time of Richardson, but it refuses the simpler means by which the lessons of this school were enforced. It seeks its effects by tremendous feats of invention, by mysterious and prodigious accidents; and in this it forecasts the later moods of romanticism even more than it reflects the wild necromancy of Mrs. Radcliffe. In fact, I find myself disposed, not too strangely, I hope, to justify that poor lady's art, so long mocked and rejected, as something quite consistent in itself, as against the decadent naturalism of Mrs. Opie.

III

The heroines of Anne Radcliffe, who was born in 1764, may be claimed for our century, because their author did not die till 1823, and the romances, whose shades they still haunt, did not begin to appear until the last decade of the eighteenth century. Chief of those which still remain to touch or appall the reader, are "The House in the Forest," published in 1791, and "The Mysteries of Udolpho," published in 1794; and I have lately read both with a surprise I am not ashamed to confess at their vigorous handling of incident, and their fertility in gloomy and goose-fleshing situations. I can well understand why such an artist as Jane Austen must contest their universal acceptance, but I have not the least doubt she enjoyed them, and privately thrilled while she laughed at them. As literature they are distinctly not despicable, as Walpole's "Castle of Otranto," which presaged them, distinctly is. They abound in a poetry which makes itself felt nearly everywhere, except in the verse which they also abound in. They wit-

ness in the author a true feeling for nature, especially in the sombre aspects, and an unquestionable power of logically relating the emotions of personality to these. Her tremendous schemes sometimes broke under her, and the reader is left to confront an anticlimax, instead of a veridical phantom; but all the same there is sublimity in the vastness of her schemes; a certain force in the conception of her types, and no slight grasp of the social facts of such countries as her travels had acquainted her with, or as she had studied from her husband's familiarity with them. Her Frenchmen and Italians are the Frenchmen and Italians of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon convention; but they are not therefore false, though they are inadequate and partial. Her villains are villains through and through, and never otherwise, and her good people always good, her fools always foolish, her sages always wise. Her heroines are never unworthy of their high mission of being rapt away by miscreants and held captive till their true lovers come to their relief. They have a gentle dignity, and a pious resignation in their trials, and at moments their emotions shape themselves in verse of indifferent quality. In any emergency they are apt to fall senseless, when it would be more convenient for them to command themselves; their morals are at all points unassailable; and under no stress will they yield to the voice of self-interest. Sometimes they are rather hard of hearing when common-sense speaks; yet they are by no means wanting in reason; and at the worst they are more probable and more lovable than such moralized heroines of the realistic decadence as Emma Castlemain. In "The Romance of the Forest" Adeline de Montalt is almost a personality, and in her most insubstantial moments she is pleasing or pathetic, as the case happens to be. She has to sustain the rôle of a young girl ignorant of her parentage, who is pursued by the pas-

sion of a profligate uncle, equally ignorant of her parentage, and is only fitfully and partially protected by a gentleman hiding from justice among the ruins of an ancient abbey in the heart of a gloomy forest on her uncle's estates. In circumstances which would be so difficult in real life, she has to suffer the jealousy of her uncertain protector's wife, and to forbid the suit of their son, an amiable youth not unworthy of the love which is won by another. But this situation is by no means impossible to the heroine, even when aggravated by her uncle's persecution of the excellent young officer to whom she gives her heart, and whom he manages to have sentenced to death for a breach of military discipline. One cannot be altogether surprised that she triumphs over her misfortunes, and is rewarded in the same moment by the reversal of her lover's sentence and the verification of her noble origin.

From the very beginning, indeed, one is taught to expect anything from a girl who is introduced to her protector, La Motte, under conditions of such a very extraordinary character as those portrayed in the opening chapter of the romance. In his flight from the King's officers La Motte loses the road, and is attracted by the light from a lonely house on the borders of the forest. Entering to inquire his way, "between the pauses of the wind he thought he distinguished the sobs and moaning of a female," and was presently confronted by a man "leading, or rather, forcibly dragging along a beautiful girl who appeared to be about eighteen. Her features were bathed in tears, and she seemed to suffer the utmost distress. The man . . . advanced towards La Motte, who had before observed other persons in the passage, and pointed a pistol at his breast. 'You are wholly in our power,' he cried. 'No assistance can reach you; if you wish to save your life swear that you will convey this girl where I may never

see her more. . . . Answer quickly; you have no time to lose.' He . . . hurried her towards La Motte, whom surprise kept silent. She sunk at his feet, and with supplicating eyes that streamed with tears implored him to have pity on her. . . . Her features, which were delicately beautiful, had gained from distress a captivating sweetness; she had

> '—An eye
> As when the blue sky trembles through a cloud
> Of purest white.'

A habit of gray camlet, with short slashed sleeves, showed but did not adorn her figure; it was thrown open at the bosom, upon which part of her hair had fallen in disorder, while the light veil, hastily thrown on, had in her confusion been suffered to fall back. . . . Such elegance and apparent refinement, contrasted with the desolation of the house, and the savage manners of its inhabitants, seemed to him like a romance of imagination rather than an occurrence of real life."

It well might seem so; but the horror (the eighteenth-century horror) of this incident is better calculated to fortify the reader against the events which ensue than the scenes of soft tranquillity which open the dark drama of "The Mysteries of Udolpho." We first see Emily St. Aubert in the tender care of a dying mother and an idyllic father, who also dies before the story is far advanced. They are all people of sensibility, residing upon an ancestral estate in Gascony, surrounded by an operatic peasantry, who "in this gay climate were often seen on an evening, when the day's labor was done, dancing in groups on the margin of the river. . . . Under the ample shade of a spreading palm-tree . . . St. Aubert loved to read and converse with Madam St. Aubert, or to play with his children, resigning himself to the influence of those sweet affections which are ever

"'ANSWER QUICKLY; YOU HAVE NO TIME TO LOSE'"

attendant on simplicity and nature. . . . In person Emily resembled her mother, having the same elegant symmetry of form, the same delicacy of features, and the same blue eyes, full of tender sweetness. . . . St. Aubert cultivated her understanding with the most scrupulous care. He gave her a general view of the sciences, and an exact acquaintance with every part of elegant literature. He taught her Latin and English, chiefly that she might understand the sublimity of their best poets."

When deprived untimely of these tender parents, at once so academically and so pastorally pleasing, Emily becomes the ward of a worldly and vulgarly ambitious sister of her father, and goes to live with her at Toulouse. Here she meets again the young Valancourt whom she has already met on a journey with her father and given her heart. Her aunt is dazzled by the brilliancy of the match, and the lovers are about to be united, when the aunt marries an Italian, much younger than herself, and at the bidding of her husband, the lurid Count Montoni, breaks off Emily's marriage. Montoni wishes to get possession of the niece's property as well as the aunt's; he travels suddenly into Italy with them, and after a sojourn amidst the pleasant corruptions of Venice, he carries them off to his castle of Udolpho in the Apennines, where the mysteries which give name to the story develop themselves, and Emily remains the prey of terror until Valancourt duly appears and effects her rescue.

The mysteries when you come to them are never quite so blood-curdling as they promise while you are working up to them; but it cannot be denied that Mrs. Radcliffe was mistress of the art of suspense in her effects. She knew how to paint a lonely landscape, and how to suggest the solitude and gloomy majesty of a fortress in the mountain forests. She understood how to touch

the nerves, to blanch the cheek, to bid the hair rise and the pulse falter. In a fashion she could make the types she used do the office of characters; she almost persuades you that Montoni lives, and quite that his wife does. If she is not so convincing in the case of Emily, still with a youthful reader on her side she has little trouble in enlisting all the necessary sympathy, all the needed hopes and fears in her behalf. Who, indeed, can withhold an appropriate shudder, when in that vast silent chamber where the girl is put to sleep, away from all the other inhabitants of the castle, she hears the sliding of the rusty bolts on the outside of her door, which has no fastening within? Whose back can resist the cold chills that the midnight music of the unseen lute, moving mystically about the halls and corridors of the castle, invites to run down it? What heart is proof against the supreme terrors of the veiled picture?

"Emily passed on till she came to a chamber hung with pictures, and took the light to examine that of a soldier . . . resembling Montoni. She shuddered and turned from it; passing the light over several other pictures, she came to one concealed by a veil of black silk. The singularity of the circumstance struck her and she stopped before it, wishing to remove the veil, and examine what could be thus carefully concealed, but somewhat wanting courage. 'Holy Virgin! What can this mean?' exclaimed Annette. 'This is surely the picture they told me of at Venice.' Emily, turning round, saw Annette's countenance grow pale. 'And what have you heard of this picture to terrify you so, my good girl?' said she. 'Nothing, ma'amselle; I have heard nothing; only I have heard there is something very dreadful belonging to it.'" It is not strange that those hints, and that tragical story of a former lady of the castle, who suddenly vanished and was never heard of more, should fix themselves in Emily's fancy, or that

"IN PERSON EMILY RESEMBLED HER MOTHER"

the next day, when exploring the castle near her room, she should think of the veiled picture, and "resolve to examine it. As she passed through the chambers that led to this, she found herself somewhat agitated; its connection with the late lady of the castle, together with the circumstance of the veil, throwing a mystery over the object that excited a faint degree of terror. But a terror of this nature, as it occupies and expands the mind, and elevates it to high expectation, is purely sublime, and leads us, by a kind of fascination, to seek even the object from which we appear to shrink. Emily passed on with faltering steps, and having paused a moment at the door before she attempted to open it, she then hastily entered the chamber, and went towards the picture, which appeared to be enclosed in a frame of uncommon size, that hung in a dark part of the room. She paused again, and then with a timid hand lifted the veil, but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture; and before she could leave the chamber dropped senseless upon the floor."

What was behind the veil?

In a famous conversation between Catharine Morland and Isabella Thorp in "Northanger Abbey," Catharine says she has been reading "Udolpho" ever since she woke and is "got to the black veil." "Are you, indeed?" cries Isabella. "Oh, I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are you not wild to know?" "Oh yes, quite; what can it be? But do not tell me; I would not be told on any account. I know it must be a skeleton; I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton."

This conjecture of Catharine's is so much more effective than the fact that I prefer to leave it; but if any reader is impatient of it, he may satisfy his curiosity by turning to the last chapters of the romance, where all the "Mysteries of Udolpho" are conscientiously explained.

SCOTT'S REBECCA AND ROWENA, AND LUCY ASHTON

IT is not only in her conscientious explanation of the "Mysteries of Udolpho" that Mrs. Radcliffe pays tribute to the realistic ideal of her time. Her romances are as chaste in motive and as modest in material as Jane Austen's novels, and far decenter than most novels of any age. They might be blamed for their blending of sublimity and absurdity, but there is no specious mixture of good and bad in them to confound the conscience by the spectacle of noble rascality or virtuous depravity in any form. One may squander one's time on them, but one cannot get positive harm from them. They may misrepresent manners, but they do not misrepresent morals; and in their idyllic passages, such as that episode of the pastor La Luc in "The Romance of the Forest," they are refining, and even edifying. It is hard not to wish a little to be like Mrs. Radcliffe's good people, and one never wishes to be like her bad people. The love-making between her heroes and heroines is of virginal purity; the heroine is always a Nice Girl, just as a heroine of Jane Austen or Frances Burney is, even if she is not a Real Girl; and it is to be claimed for Anne Radcliffe that she too helped with the other great women authors of her time to characterize Anglo-Saxon fiction with decency. When the magic wand fell from her hold, it passed to the

keeping of a man whose ideal was as high and pure as her own.

I

So far as any man may be said to invent anything, Walter Scott invented the historical novel. His fiction drew upon the life of the past for characters and events, which he colored and shaped and posed to serve the ends of a fancied scheme. Historical personages had been used before his time, as in those monstrous and tedious fables classified in the annals of fiction as the heroical romances. Many Asian and African princes, wondrously translated, figure in the illimitable pages of Gomberville, Calprenade, and Scuderi; the rival families of Granada, after valiant service in the supposititious Spanish chronicles, were made to amuse the vast leisure of the ladies and gentlemen of Louis XIV.'s court by the same authors. But these authors took liberties with the originals of their creations such as Scott never allowed himself. He did not mind forcing a civilization in the hot-bed of his fancy, or transposing the peculiarities of one epoch to another; but he kept a fairly good conscience as to personality, and his historical characters realize in reasonable measure the ideal of tradition, if not of veritable record.

His evolution as a historical novelist reveals the simplicity of his nature and the open-hearted directness of his aim so winningly that you love the man more and more, while you respect the artist less and less. It is not that in going from the desultory Scotch stories he began with to the English, Continental, and Oriental motives he ended with, he did not learn something more of form and effect. But what he gained in these, he lost in more vital things. He no longer wrote of what he knew and believed in, but what he studied and made-

believe in. His earlier Scotch stories show his wish for truth to life, not only in the facts which he accumulates in prefaces and notes to attest the verity of the incidents, but in those finer things which the heart of the reader best corroborates. This wish was the principle of the realists whom he followed and surpassed in the popular favor, with a frank and generous shame for his triumph; but when he abandoned his native ground in the fear he so single-heartedly owns that his readers must get tired of his Scotch stories if he kept on with them, he did not perhaps abandon this principle, but he abandoned the best means of fulfilling it. He was a great literary force; he had got an immense creative impetus, and he could not help doing things that attracted and interested, but it must be confessed that he weakened more and more in the power of doing things that convinced. The early Scotch stories are those which his grown-up readers have not tired of; while all but boys and girls (and rather young boys and girls) have tired of the romances which he forsook them for In these the characters degenerate into types, heroic, hollow, that resound with echoing verbiage, and personate one quality and tendency. This seems to me especially true of the women, or the types of women, who are what he makes them, not what he finds them. He clothes them in certain attributes, as he habits them in certain garments, and he appoints them certain ceremonial relations to the facts which are mostly outside of the real drama, or inessential to it. In "Ivanhoe" the action scarcely concerns either Rebecca or Rowena; the love-making, so far as there is any, is between Rebecca and Ivanhoe, and yet Ivanhoe placidly marries Rowena, with whom he has, to the reader's knowledge, not made love at all. In fiction women exist in the past, present, or future tenses, the infinitive, indicative, potential, or imperative moods of love-making; otherwise

REBECCA AND ROWENA

they do not exist at all, and no phantom of delight, masquerading in their clothes, suffices. Both Rowena and Rebecca might be left out of "Ivanhoe," and the story would not be the poorer for their absence. Rowena, in fact, is a large, blond, calm nonentity, not only passionless, but traitless. Rebecca is conventionally filial, conventionally noble and pathetic; but she is without inconsistency, without variation, which are the soul of feminine identity, and she does not persuade us that she has any real business in the scene. Her moment of greatest vitality is that where she is imprisoned in the tower of Front-de-Boeuf's castle, and reports to her fellow-captive, the wounded Ivanhoe, the events of the assault as they pass under her eye around the beleaguered walls. I do not know whether this is accounted a scene of uncommon power by the critics or not, but it seems to me so.

"'And I must lie here like a bedridden monk,' exclaimed Ivanhoe, 'while the game that gives me freedom or death is played out by others! Look from the window once again, kind maiden, but beware that you are not marked by the archers beneath. . . . What dost thou see, Rebecca?' 'Nothing but the cloud of arrows that fly so thick as to dazzle mine eyes, and to hide the bowmen who shoot them.' 'That cannot endure,' cried Ivanhoe. 'If they press not right on to carry the castle by pure force of arms, the archery may avail but little against stone walls and bulwarks.' . . . She turned her head from the lattice as if unable longer to endure a sight so terrible. 'Look forth again, Rebecca,' said Ivanhoe, mistaking the cause of her retiring. . . . 'There is now less danger.' Rebecca again looked forth and almost immediately exclaimed, 'Holy prophets of the law! Front-de-Boeuf and the Black Knight fight hand to hand in the breach, amid the roar of their followers, who watch the progress of the strife

with the cause of the oppressed and of the captive!' She then uttered a loud shriek, and exclaimed, 'He is down!—he is down!' 'Who is down?' cried Ivanhoe. 'For our dear Lady's sake, tell me which has fallen.' 'The Black Knight,' answered Rebecca faintly; then instantly again shouted with joyful eagerness—'But no!—but no!—the name of the Lord of Hosts be blessed! —he is on foot again, and fights as if there were twenty men's strength in his single arm. His sword is broken —he snatches an axe from a yeoman—he presses Front-de-Boeuf with blow on blow—the giant stoops and totters like an oak under the steel of the woodsman—he falls, he falls!' 'Front-de-Boeuf?' exclaimed Ivanhoe. 'Front-de-Boeuf!' answered the Jewess. 'The assailants have won the postern gate, have they not?' asked Ivanhoe. 'They have, they have,' exclaimed Rebecca, 'and they press the besieged hard upon the outer wall; some plant ladders, some swarm like bees, and endeavor to ascend upon the shoulders of each other —down go stones, beams, and trunks of trees. As they bear the wounded to the rear, fresh men supply their places in the assault. . . . The Black Knight approaches the postern with his huge axe—the thundering blows which he deals, you may hear them above all the din and shouts of the battle. Stones and beams are hailed down on the bold champion—he regards them no more than if they were thistle-down or feathers! . . . The postern gate shakes, it crashes, it is splintered by his blows—they rush in—the outwork is gone—Oh, God!—they hurl the defenders from the battlements—they throw them into the moat—Oh, men, if ye be men indeed, spare them that can resist no longer! . . . Our friends strengthen themselves within the outwork which they have mastered; and it affords them so good a shelter from the foeman's shot, that the garrison only bestow a few bolts on it from interval to in-

terval, as if rather to disquiet, than effectually to injure them.'"

II

One easily perceives that it is the author, and not a young mediæval Jewess who is describing the scene in these literary terms; and it is no great wonder that Ivanhoe, finding himself in company with an elderly novelist instead of a beautiful girl, drops off to sleep upon the assurance of victory for his side, after a brief argument upholding the ideal of chivalry against that of humanity, which the supposed Jewess maintains. The passage must often have been praised, and the situation is so well imagined that the unreality of the heroine cannot spoil it quite. It may be said that she is as real as the hero, and she is certainly as well fitted to take the fancy of those boys of all ages to whom the romance of "Ivanhoe" has now almost wholly fallen. Rebecca is not much more probable or palpable in the scenes where she repels the wicked love of the Templar, or meets his accusation before the judges who condemn her to death, or even in that climax where Ivanhoe rises from a sick-bed to do battle for her against her enemy and his. But she is always so much more alive than Rowena, that she exists at least by contrast.

The story in which she has her being seems to have been the first which Scott wrote when he began to be afraid his Scotch stories were wearying his public. The romance which immediately preceded "Ivanhoe" was "The Bride of Lammermoor," not perhaps the best of the Scotch stories, but a tale which has most deeply appealed to the hearts of gentle readers. Of all Scott's heroines Lucy Ashton is, after Jeanie Deans, perhaps the most persuasive of her reality. She is almost purely tragical. From the very beginning you can see her

dark fate following the yielding and tender creature on "that way madness lies," and it avails little that the Master of Ravenswood saves her from a mad bull in the opening chapters, or that they plight their troth and have their brief hour of happiness in the shadow of her doom. When you see her at last, gibbering and gloating over the bleeding body of the husband whom she had stabbed on her wedding-night, it is as if you had foreseen it all from the first. She has fewer words in her tragedy than even Ophelia in hers; but she remains in the memory with the like clinging hold upon the pity of the witness. The book is much better in construction than most of Scott's novels; it has far more form than he commonly knew how to give them, and, basing itself so largely as it does upon facts known to him, it has a truth that the others seldom had. This truth, strangely enough, is concentrated in the passive girl who scarcely speaks; who is blown about like a lily in the stormy events and the violent passions that surge around her, and suffers everything, but does nothing. She hardly utters a word in that last scene between Ravenswood and herself, when he returns to the house from which he has been driven with atrocious insult by her mother, to question the hapless creature of her own part in her betrothal to Bucklaw; yet she is the very soul of the tremendous incident.

"He planted himself full in the middle of the apartment, opposite to the table at which Lucy was seated, on whom, as if she had been alone in the chamber, he bent his eyes with a mingled expression of deep grief and deliberate indignation. His dark-colored riding cloak, displaced from one shoulder, hung around one side of his person in the ample folds of the Spanish mantle. His slouched hat, which he had not removed at entrance, gave an additional gloom to his dark features, which, wasted by sorrow and marked by the

JEANIE DEANS

ghastly look communicated by long illness, added to a countenance naturally somewhat stern and wild, a fierce and even savage expression. . . . He said not a single word, and there was a deep silence in the company for more than two minutes. It was broken by Lady Ashton, who in that space partly recovered her natural audacity. She demanded to know the cause of this unauthorized intrusion. 'That is a question, madam,' said her son, 'which I have the best right to ask.' . . . Bucklaw interposed, saying, 'No man on earth should usurp his previous right in demanding an explanation from the Master.' . . . The passions of the two young men thus counteracting each other, gave Ravenswood leisure to exclaim, in a stern and steady voice, 'Silence!—let him who really seeks danger, take the fitting time when it may be found; my mission here will shortly be accomplished. Is that your handwriting, madam?' he added, in a softer tone, extending towards Miss Ashton her last letter. A faltering 'Yes,' seemed rather to escape from her lips than to be uttered as a voluntary answer. 'And is *this* your handwriting?' extending towards her their mutual engagement. Lucy remained silent. Terror and a yet stronger and more confused feeling so utterly disturbed her understanding that she probably scarcely comprehended the question that was put to her. . . . 'Sir William Ashton,' said Ravenswood . . . 'if this young lady of her own free will desires the restoration of this contract, as her letter would seem to imply, there is not a withered leaf which this autumn wind strews on the heath, that is more valueless in my eyes. But I must and will hear the truth from her own mouth . . . alone, and without witnesses. Lady Ashton is welcome to remain, but let all others depart.' Ravenswood, when the men had left the room, bolted the door, and returned, raised his hat from his forehead, and gazing upon Lucy with eyes

in which an expression of sorrow overcame their late fierceness . . . said, 'Do you know me, Miss Ashton? I am still Edgar Ravenswood.' She was silent, and he went on with increasing vehemence, 'I am still that Edgar Ravenswood, who . . . for your sake forgave, nay clasped hands with the oppressor and pillager of his house—the traducer and murderer of his father.' 'My daughter,' answered Lady Ashton, 'has no occasion to dispute the identity of your person; the venom of your present language is sufficient to remind her that she speaks with the mortal enemy of her father.' 'I pray you to be patient, madam. . . . My answer must come from her own lips. Once more, Miss Lucy Ashton, I am that Ravenswood to whom you granted the solemn engagement which you now desire to retract and cancel.' Lucy's bloodless lips could only falter out the words, 'It was my mother.' 'She speaks truly,' said Lady Ashton. 'It *was* I, who, authorized alike by the laws of God and man, advised her and concurred with her to set aside an unhappy and precipitate engagement—and to annul it by the authority of Scripture itself. . . . You have asked what questions you thought fit. You see the total incapacity of my daughter to answer you. You desire to know whether Lucy Ashton of her own free will desires to annul the engagement into which she has been trepanned. . . . Here is the contract which she this morning subscribed . . . with Mr. Hastings of Bucklaw.' Ravenswood gazed upon the deed as if petrified. 'This is indeed, madam, an undeniable piece of evidence. . . . There, madam,' he said, laying down before Lucy the signed paper and the broken piece of gold—'there are the evidences of your first engagement; may you be more faithful to that which you have just formed. I will trouble you to return the corresponding tokens of my ill-placed confidence—I ought rather to say my egregious folly.' Lucy returned the

scornful glance of her lover with a gaze from which perception seemed to have been banished; yet she seemed partly to have understood his meaning, for she raised her hands as if to undo a blue ribbon which she wore about her neck. She was unable to accomplish her purpose, but Lady Ashton cut the ribbon asunder, and detached the broken piece of gold, which Miss Ashton had till then worn in her bosom; the written counterpart of the lover's engagement she for some time had had in her own possession. With a haughty courtesy she delivered both to Ravenswood."

In spite of the slovenly construction of these passages, the repetitions, the touches of melodrama, the whole want of artistic delicacy and precision, the spirit of an immensely affecting tragedy is here present. Lucy's part is so greatly and simply imagined that a word more from her, the least expression of protest or imploring would detract from its heart-breaking beauty. Such a scene could not be the work of less than a master, who alone would know how a little later to add, stiffly and formally, indeed, but with skill to extract yet a drop more of pathos from the fact, "Miss Ashton never alluded to what had passed in the state room. It seemed doubtful if she was even conscious of it, for she was often observed to raise her hands to her neck, as if in search of the ribbon that had been taken from it, and to mutter in surprise and discontent, when she could not find it, 'It was the link that bound me to life.'"

III

Scott's failures were among his gentilities, his lords and ladies, his princes and princesses, who are always more or less like the poorer sort of stage players. I do not know that he fails more signally with his women

than with his men in high life; but Lucy Ashton is the only woman of gentle birth in his romances whom I remember, from my first long-ago reading, for her distinguished qualities, if indeed she has more than one of these. All his women of lower station, however, especially those that come casually and momentarily into the story, are alive, and speak a tongue as different from the literary language of their betters as nature is from artifice. He was essentially a humorist and humanist; he dearly loved and enjoyed such of his fellow-beings as he could come close to through their originality, or eccentricity, or simplicity; and there is no laird's leddy, no bare-legged lassie, no screaming or scolding old-wife, who is not as veritable as any man of her rank, and far more so than any man of higher rank. Such figures abound in his Scotch stories and give them that air of reality which is never quite absent from them. But again when he transcends the sort of character which he knows personally or by familiar hearsay, he fails as dismally in diving low as in soaring high. With such a figure as Meg Merrilies, for instance, he does nothing that convinces you of her verity; she remains as strictly of melodrama as any mouthing champion in "Ivanhoe"; Rowena herself is not more really unreal, not more improbably moved; and she is far less noisy and tiresome; for the maledictions of Meg Merrilies actually bore one; and Meg is mostly maledictions.

In the story which resounds with them, there is one young lady who divides the honors of heroine with the gypsy; and in her, for once, Scott is able to impart the charm of a lively girlishness. Julia Mannering is sinuously true, after the manner of her sex, and light of tongue and heart rather than head. She is a genuine personality; and she carries off an impossible part in the plot with so much vivacity and naturalness that

LUCY ASHTON

one is almost as much in love with her as with any of the ignorant and amusing housewives and farmbodies.

"Waverley" offers no such figure as this young lady in "Guy Mannering," to my liking. Rose Bradwardine is a nice girl, and fit to be married by a hero who repents being fool enough to have fought for the Pretender. But the farthest stretch of charity cannot find her a character. She does what a young lady ought because she is bidden; her speech is the effect of that ventriloquism which Scott too obviously practised in speaking his own words from whatever lips were convenient. She is not the worst instrument of this sort; and Flora Mac Ivor is not the most diaphanous of the author's failures to construct a credible image of historic motive and personality. It is not that the sister of a Highland chieftain, supporting the rebellion of Charles Edward Stuart, might not play the part assigned to Flora Mac Ivor; but that she does not play it in a way to make us feel that she is deeply interested in it. We are told much about her, but we are shown very little; and are made witnesses of but one moment of poignant feeling in a woman who must have had many, if she were really a woman. This climax is fitly reached in that last interview of Waverley's with Flora when he finds her sewing upon the shroud of her brother who is about to be executed for treason. Then she blames herself for her brother's doom as something that her own impassioned loyalty to the Stuarts had urged him forward to. She realizes that the cause was always hopeless, and while she still believes it just and sacred, she agonizes at her part in it for her brother's sake. This point is really fine—the finest in a story whose course is loose and straggling, and whose effects have rarely the compactness that deep passion alone can give.

SCOTT'S JEANIE DEANS AND COOPER'S LACK OF HEROINES

THE nature of Scott's heroines is such that the choice of this one or that, as the most representative, is a question of intellectual preference rather than of passion, and could hardly rouse feeling in any but their duly appointed lovers. Fortunately for Scott, he does not live by them; one cannot quite say that without them he would still be one of the greatest novelists, and chief of the great romancers; but one may very safely say that such general impression as one keeps of his fiction is not strengthened by a vivid sense of these ladies. Only now and then, and here and there, are they essential to the lasting effect; one recalls them vaguely and with an effort; they are not voluntarily constant to the fancy like the women of Thackeray, of George Eliot, of Charles Reade, even of Dickens; and of some other more modern novelists, above all Mr. Hardy. In the imaginary world of Scott's creation, woman remained as subordinate as he found her in the civic world about him. He invented a man's world, and perhaps because women did not come into their rights in it, his man's world has now mostly lapsed to a boy's world, where there is little need of the glamour which women cast upon life.

I

I have already noted one chief exception to the prevailing nullity of Scott's heroines in the sad reality of

Lucy Ashton, and I shall hardly contrary any critical reader in suggesting Jeanie Deans as another. No characters could well be more strongly contrasted, and one cannot think of them without feeling that in this direction, as in so many others, Scott's performance was a very imperfect measure of his possibility. If he had not been driven to make quantity, what quality might not he have given us! If he had not had the burden of telling a story upon him, how much more he might have told us of life! If he had not felt bound to portray swashbucklers, with what gracious and touching portraits of womanhood might not he have enriched his page! The man himself was so modest and single of heart that the secret of the ever-womanly would gladly have imparted itself to him if he had not been, as it were, too shy to suffer the confidence. Whenever he caught some hint of it by chance, how clearly he set it down! But for the most part, as I have already said, these chances addressed him from low life; gentlewomen seem rarely to have confided their more complex natures to him. For once, indeed, he saw a Lucy Ashton in the plain air of day, where many Lucy Ashtons dwell and have dwelt, and not less importantly he saw Jeanie Deans; but it was more in his way to see such as Jeanie than to see such as Lucy, and I cannot help thinking it was less an achievement to have fixed her presence lastingly in the reader's consciousness.

Such as she is, however, she stands foremost, I believe, in the critical appreciation of Scott's heroines, and it will be useless to oppose the figure of Effie Deans as somewhat unfairly overshadowed by her. Jeanie has the great weight of moral sentiment on her side; and yet I have a fancy that Scott himself, if he could really have been got at, would have owned he thought it a little finer to keep Effie impenitently true to herself throughout than to show Jeanie equal to the burden

which her sister's lightness cast upon her. At any rate, it seems to me an effect of great mastery (once more surprising than now) to let us see that Effie was always the same nature, in the shame of her unlawful motherhood, in the stress of her trial for the crime against her child's life which she was guiltless of, in the horror of the scaffold to which she was unjustly doomed, and in the rebound from the danger and disgrace when Jeanie's devotion had won her release from both. She was wrought upon by the passing facts, but not changed in her nature by them, as Jeanie was not changed in hers. We judge one another so inadequately and unfairly in the actual world, however, that beings of the imaginary world must not expect better treatment. There as here, the light nature will be condemned for the deeds done in it as if they were done in a serious nature, and a serious nature will be honored for truth to itself as if it had overcome in this the weakness of a light nature. Especially among all peoples of Anglo-Saxon birth and breeding will the same inflexible measure of morality be applied, and the characterization of one who has done nobly will be thought greater than that of one who has not done nobly.

II

In this I hope I am not giving the notion that I wish to undervalue the character of Jeanie Deans as a piece of art. I value it above that of any other woman, except Lucy Ashton, or except Effie Deans, in all Scott's romances; but that is saying less than I should like in praise of it. Her character grows upon you, as no doubt it grew upon Scott himself, who must have found that he had something constantly greater and truer in hand than he first imagined. The simple girl matures

EFFIE DEANS

slowly into shapeliness and strength, much as the straggling story of "The Heart of Midlothian" itself does, and it is not till her young sister's misfortune and the suspicion of child-murder begins to blacken about the hapless Effie that Jeanie shows the force of a heroine. She stands nearest the Covenanter conscience of their "dour" old father, and she stands between his conscience and her sister's blame when it comes to that, with a hold upon the reader's heart that tightens to suffocation at that awful moment in court when her helpless truth gives away her sister's life.

The intensity of this feeling for her increases rather than lessens after Effie's sentence, when Jeanie goes up to London, alone and unfriended, to sue for the King's mercy. It is finely shown how she does not change, but enlarges in character to the measure of her tremendous mission. Through all her difficulties and dangers, and in every demand upon her truth to herself and faith in her sister's innocence of the crime which Effie is doomed to die for, she is still the same plain Scotch country body that we saw her at first, of a presence which the author is too wise to flatter. "She was short, and rather too stoutly made for her size, her gray eyes, light-colored hair, a round, good-humored face, much tanned by the sun; and her only peculiar charm was an air of inexpressible serenity, which a good conscience, kind feelings, contented temper and the regular discharge of all her duties, spread over her features." In this figure she visits the Duke of Argyle, the embodiment to her unworldliness of all worldly greatness under royalty, and wins his promise to help her see the King. Not only her calm, wholesome goodness, her sore-tried love for her sister, and her innocent naïveté appear in the interview, but there are charming hints of the Scotch canniness which qualifies and quickens her virtues, if it is indeed not one of them.

"'I wad hae putten on a cap, sir,' said Jeanie, when Argyle bids her go dressed as she is to the audience he has got for her, 'but your honor knows it isna the fashion of my country for single women; and I judged that being sae mony hundred miles frae home, your Grace's heart wad warm to the tartan,' looking at the corner of her plaid. 'You judged quite right,' said the Duke. 'Macallumore's heart will be as cold as death can make it, when it does not warm to the tartan. Now, go away, and do not be out of the way when I send.' 'There is little fear of that, sir. . . . But if I might say to your gracious honor, that if ye ever condescend to speak to ony ane that is of greater degree than yoursel', though maybe it isna civil in me to say sae, just if ye wad think there canna be any sic odds as between poor Jeanie Deans of St. Leonard's and the Duke of Argyle; and so dinna be chappit back or cast down by the first rough answer!' 'I am not apt,' said the Duke, laughing, 'to mind rough answers much. . . . I will do my best, but God has the hearts of kings in His own hand.'"

The incidents of Jeanie's audience with Caroline, whom the girl does not know for the Queen till the end, when Caroline gives her a little needle-book for remembrance, are of note too common for reproduction; but I like so much a pretty touch in her ensuing conversation with Argyle, that I wish I could believe myself the first to feel it. "'And that leddy *was* the Queen hersel'?' said Jeanie. 'I misdoubted it when I saw your honor didna put on your hat.' 'It was certainly Queen Caroline. . . . Have you no curiosity to see what is in the little pocket-book?' '*Do you think the pardon will be in it?*' said Jeanie with the eager animation of hope. 'Why, no. . . . They seldom carry these things about them . . . and besides, her Majesty told you it was the King, not she, who was to grant it.' 'That is true,' said Jeanie, 'but I am so confused in my mind.'"

In such slight things, such casual, lateral touches, the master shows himself rather than in what Scott called "the big bow-bow," and abandoned himself to, alas! so much, because the big bow-bow is so pleasing. A student of human nature will find more of Jeanie in these than in the signal moments of the story where she has the heroine's official part to play; as he will find more of Effie in her flying with her lover, when her pardon comes, without staying Jeanie's return, than in the incidents of her imprisonment and trial. It is from a yet deeper and bolder knowledge of the heart that the author ventures to show, when Effie is married and comes back a lady of rank to visit poor Jeanie, that they both perceive how little they have in common, and willingly part again. Still, that is a great scene, a piece of mighty drama, at the trial, when Jeanie is called to testify concerning Effie under the atrocious law which judged the mother guilty of her child's death if this happened because she had not sought the needed help in the hour of her agony and dishonor. It was the hope of the defence that Effie might be shown to have trusted Jeanie with her secret, and "the poor prisoner instantly started up, and stretched herself half-way over the bar, toward the side at which her sister was to enter. And when, slowly following the official, the witness advanced to the foot of the table, Effie, with the whole expression of her countenance altered from that of confused shame and dismay to an eager, imploring and almost ecstatic earnestness of entreaty, with outstretched hand, hair streaming back, eyes raised eagerly to her sister's face and glistening through tears, exclaimed, in a tone that went to the heart of all who heard her, 'O, Jeanie, Jeanie, save me, save me!' . . . Old Deans drew himself still further back under cover of the bench so that . . . his venerable form was no longer visible." Fairbrother, Effie's counsel, "saw the necessity of letting the witness

compose herself. In his heart he suspected that she came to bear false witness in her sister's cause. . . . He asked whether she had not remarked her sister's state of health to be altered. 'And she told you the cause of it, my dear, I suppose? . . . Take courage,—speak out.' 'I asked her,' replied Jeanie, 'what ailed her.' 'Very well—take your own time—and what was the answer she made?' . . . Jeanie was silent, and looked deadly pale. It was not that she at any one instant entertained an idea of the possibility of prevarication—it was the natural hesitation to extinguish the last spark of hope that remained for her sister. 'Take courage, young woman,' said Fairbrother. 'I asked what she said ailed her when you inquired.' 'Nothing,' answered Jeanie, with a faint voice which was yet distinctly heard in the most distant corner of the court-room, such an awful and profound silence had been preserved. . . . Fairbrother's countenance fell. . . . 'Nothing? True, you mean nothing at *first*, but when you asked her again, did she not tell you what ailed her?' The question was put in a tone meant to make her comprehend the importance of her answer. . . With less pause than at first she now replied, 'Alack, alack! she never breathed a word to me about it.' A deep groan passed through the court. It was echoed by one deeper and more agonized from the unfortunate father . . . and the venerable old man fell forward senseless . . . with his head at the foot of his terrified daughter. . . . The unfortunate prisoner . . . strove with the guards. . . . 'Let me gang to my father! I *will* gang to him! He is dead—he is killed —I hae killed him!' Even in this moment of agony Jeanie did not lose that superiority which a deep and firm mind assures to its possessor. . . . 'He is my father—he is our father,' she mildly repeated to those who endeavored to separate them, as she stooped, shaded

aside his gray hairs and began assiduously to chafe his temples."

III

The loose, inaccurate and ineffectual languaging of this scene is partially concealed by the condensation of the foregoing passages. I know that to many it will seem irreverence little short of sacrilege to speak of Scott's work in these terms; but truth is more precious than sentiment, and no harm but much help can come from recognizing the facts. In verse, Scott was a master of diction, compact, clear, simple; in prose, at least the prose of his novels, he was shapeless, tautological, heavy, infirm, wandering, melodramatic and over-literary. The incident, however, is here so nobly imagined that the reader is held above the course of its feeble and inadequate realization, and shares with the author in the greatness of his concept. It is quite useless to pretend otherwise, and one has only to think how Tolstoy, for instance, or Tourguénief would have presented the scene, in order to feel the vast imperfection, the deficiency in surplus, of Scott's treatment. But the world has done him justice, in such things, and where his idea is great, it has measured him by the affluence of his concept, and not by the poverty of his product.

He was of an age which was over-literary, and which the influence of his error was making more and more so. His error was not wholly his; it was largely the effect of precedent conditions; but it was not the necessary effect. He fell into it, because it was easy, and offered itself to his hurry and his careless hand, as a ready means of satisfying a public ignorant of truth and indifferent to beauty. Artifice can hide the lack of art, melodrama can conceal the absence of drama; and the time for which Scott wrote really preferred artifice and melodrama. In an admirable essay on the romances

of Charles Brockden Brown, the first American novelist to give us standing in the world of fiction, Colonel T. W. Higginson justly notes in defence of Brown's turgidity that "the general style of the period . . . was itself melodramatic. . . . One has only to read over the private letters of any educated family of that period to see that people did not then express themselves as they now do; that they were far more ornate in utterance, more involved in statement, more impassioned in speech." All this is very true, but it is also true that, in spite of the common tendency, there was a strong, lucid undercurrent back to nature in the writings of authors whose excellence Scott himself generously recognized. He praised these as his superiors, and it is hard in the face of his fine modesty to blame him for not emulating their sanity and verity. But he *must* be blamed for doing what he knew better than to do; and the student of his work will always be to blame if he fails to declare that with all his moral virtues Scott in fiction was of a low æsthetic ideal. He consciously preferred, with his great poetic soul, the folly and the falsity of the romantic to the beauty of the natural, and he wittingly, however unwillingly, extended the realm of Anne Radcliffe rather than the realm of Jane Austen. It was easier to do this, far easier; for the true, the only beautiful, is exigent of patience and of pains that Scott would not or could not give. Whether he could not or would not, he made it harder for his contemporaries and successors to be of a higher ideal than that by which he won his immense success. I believe the badness of Scott's prose in fiction is owing to the lowness of his ideal rather than to the general style of his own period. Sometimes the greatness of a concept can show through the hollow and pompous forms of the product; but this happens rarely. What happens often is that the artificiality of the product is a fair expression of the concept.

This is true of the work of Scott's greatest follower and disciple, James Fenimore Cooper. It would be pleasant to believe that he was of his own initiative, but it would not be true; and though Cooper was so far original through his patriotism as to prefer American scenes and themes in his fiction, he most distinctly was because Scott had been. His literature was both better and worse than Scott's. It was more compact and more dramatic, no doubt from his more strenuous temperament; but it lacked that depth of humanity which one always feels under Scott's turbid surfaces, and it is wholly without the sweet play of his humor, the sudden flashes of his inspiration. So far as I know it, his romance has never the grace that Scott wins now and again for his from the presence of a genuine heroine. But on this point I was willing to own myself not very well fitted to judge, since my knowledge of Cooper was at best vague and of remote date; and in my misgiving I turned to a literary friend who had made rather a special study of him, and entreated him to help me out with a heroine from him. He answered in effect that the heroines of Cooper did not exist even in the imagination of his readers; there were certain figures in his pages, always introduced as "females," and of such an extremely conventional and ladylike deportment in all circumstances that you wished to kill them. But he added, in a magnanimous despair, that if I would I might read "The Last of the Mohicans," and possibly come away with a heroine. I have just finished the book, with a true regret that I was not a boy of fourteen, or else a man in the second quarter of the century, when I read it; but I have not come away with a heroine. This is not because I have killed either Cora Munro or her sister Alice; but since I am guiltless of their death I am glad they *are* dead.

Long ago I read several romances of Charles Brock-

den Brown, but of those dreams nothing more remains to me now than of some that I dreamed myself about the year 1875. Certainly, no shadow of a heroine remains from them, and I am sure that if there had been the shadow of a heroine in them she would have remained. In fact, the heroine of a romantic novel seldom does, or can, remain with the reader, for the plain reason that she seldom exists. Apparently the ever-womanly refuses herself to the novelist who proposes anything but truth to nature; apparently she cannot trust him. She may not always be so very sincere herself, but she requires sincerity in the artist who would take her likeness, and it is only in the fiction of one who faithfully reports his knowledge of things seen that she will deign to show her face, to let her divine presence be felt. That is the highest and best fiction, and her presence is the supreme evidence of its truth to the whole of life.

A HEROINE OF BULWER'S

MANY proofs of the fact that a novel is great or not, as its women are important or unimportant, might be alleged. There are exceptions to the rule, but they are among novels of ages and countries different from ours. As we approach our own time, women in fiction become more and more interesting, and are of greater consequence than the men in fiction, and the skill with which they are portrayed is more and more a test of mastery. By this test the romantic novel shows its inferiority, if by no other; we have only to compare the work of Richardson, Goldsmith, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Thackeray, George Eliot, Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. George Moore, Mr. Henry James, Harold Frederic, Mr. George W. Cable, Miss Mary E. Wilkins, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and the other realistic or *realescent* novelists with that of the romanticists, in order to see how vast this inferiority is. If we go outside of our own language, we must note the supremacy of women in the fiction of Goethe, Manzoni, Balzac, Tourguénief, Zola, Maupassant, Björnsen, Valdés, Galdós, Verga, and Sudermann. These masters have presented women livingly, winningly, convincingly as no master of romance has. The greatest exception that occurs to me is, of course, Hawthorne; but even he created his most lifelike woman character, Zenobia, in his most realistic story, "The Blithedale Romance." Women, above all others, should love the fiction which is faithful to life, for no

other fiction has paid the homage and done the justice due to women, or recognized their paramount interest.

I

Mrs. Radcliffe inspired our Charles Brockden Brown, just as Scott inspired our James Fenimore Cooper. Scott, of course, influenced all Europe, as Richardson and Goldsmith had done in their time; and until the rise of Balzac a whole generation wrote little else but historical novels, though in Germany the romantic movement eventuated in something that was more purely romance, like the "Undine" of De la Motte Fouqué. To a certain extent among the English the romantic impulse resulted in a yet more psychological type, of which Mrs. Shelley's "Frankenstein" is a superlative example. But in that thin air woman, who is far more of "this sensible warm motion" than man, gasped for breath; and scarcely a palpable heroine remains to us from all that generation of romancers. Such diaphanous embodiments as they could give her traits, waned more and more into symbols; the art of presenting her with her vital charm, distinct, individual, actual as the early realists had known her, seemed lost; and when a realescent talent like Balzac arrived, and began to cast about him in every-day life for the bizarre contrasts and eccentricities, the surprising accidents and tremendous catastrophes which the romancers had sought afar in remote times and under strange skies, he did little to give woman her old importance in fiction. The pathetic and beautiful vision of his Eugénie Grandet rises to reproach me for saying this, and I hasten to acknowledge in her a heroine worthy of the best age of fiction. But still I think that what I say holds true, and that again, as with Hawthorne, the exception proves the rule.

As for the nautical romance which Cooper popularized, and which Captain Marryat carried forward upon the impulse Cooper had given him, it was, still less than the historical or psychological romance, the habitat of the true heroine. In my time I read every one of Marryat's novels, but no gleam of a woman's eye, or drift of a woman's drapery haunts my remembrance of them. Cooper could occasionally find use for a "female" as a captive among his Indians; and no doubt there were figures which passed for heroines in Marryat's land-going stories. Until Mr. Clark Russell's time, however, the marine novel was unfavorable to the heroine. He alone seems to have had the secret of divining lovely girls on water-logged wrecks, or of having his heroes marooned with them on palmy islands of the Spanish Main; though it is due to the many-sidedness of Charles Reade to recall that in "Foul Play," which is so largely a sea story, there is a heroine of such charm, so sweetly and truly a woman, that any man would be willing to be cast away with her on a desert coast, and very loath to be rescued, except in her company.

II

We may explain the absence of genuine women in romantic fiction less charitably than I have already explained it, and suppose that it was a revulsion from their extreme prevalence in the early realistic fiction. Or, we may allow that in all the more active adventures and more tremendous exigencies, a heroine was so difficult to manage that she had to be left out as much as the hero's functional requirement of some one to love would permit. In a representation of every-day life she could always very credibly give a good account of herself, but in what may be called every-other-day life

she apparently did not know what to do. Her simple and single device of a "falling lifeless," as in the case of "females" of "sensibility," was soon exhausted, and, even when in a dead faint, she was apt to be a burden on the action; the hero had to lug her off, either in his arms or on his saddle-bow, or else leave her to the villain, who could seldom be trusted with the care of a lady.

The possibilities of the swoon, indeed, had been pretty well exhausted, when the novel began slowly to return to the study of human nature under the ordinary social conditions. Heroines were confronted with situations to which they were more equal as women, and they fainted less as time went on, until now a lady "falls lifeless" in fiction almost as rarely as in life. The effect in these matters is largely reciprocal, and no doubt the evanescence of the swoon in life is due in turn to its disappearance in fiction. At any rate, fainting is as obsolete as "bursting a blood-vessel," which used to be so common in novels; and the habit of carrying salts which every lady had who wished to pass for a "delicate female," and which continued till the middle of the century, would seem something too funny to her golfing granddaughters, who talk of each other as "women" and share the hardy sports of "men." The novelists themselves began to find hysterics funny, and some employed them to move the mirth of their readers, while the heroines of others were still swooning seriously. To this day they still "burst into tears," and "choke with sobs"; but so do women in life, and so did men once. In the novels of Richardson men weep quite as copiously as women, and upon as little provocation; and possibly one of the few good effects of the novel of adventure was to steel the nerves of the hero, at least, against the melting mood. It may be supposed that in the stress of saving his own life or taking the life of some one else, he could not find the moment for burst-

ing into tears, or choking with sobs; and that he behaved something more like a man from mere pressure of business.

One may go further than this, and imagine that the two schools profited by each other both in the way of warning and the way of example. Certainly the realescents, like Balzac and Hugo, and like Bulwer and Dickens, who followed the romancers, copied some of their virtues as well as their faults; and if they did not copy all the virtues of the early realists, they eschewed most of their faults.

Bulwer and Dickens both brought fiction back to the study of life upon terms as novel as their respective points of view were different. Bulwer was some ten years before Dickens in imparting the surprise they each had for his contemporaries; and the surprise that Bulwer operated in "Pelham" must have been much greater than we can imagine now when we look back and find the story so vulgarly and viciously commonplace under the glare of its worldly splendor. He called it "The Adventures of a Gentleman," and so it might have been, as gentlemen went in those days; but now it would rather be called "The Adventures of a Blackguard," so much have gentlemen or blackguards since improved. In abandoning the fanciful realm of the romancers, and returning to the world of actualities, Bulwer did not return to the unsparing ideal of the first realists, and seek the good of his reader by pointing the moral of his tale; still less did he conceive of the principle which has vitalized the later realists, and leave a faithful study of life, in cause and effect, to enforce its own lesson. In his early fiction we move in a region where the moral law is apparently suspended, as it often seems to be in this unhappy world of ours, and where good does not follow from good or evil from evil, as it finally does to our experience. Cynical conventions,

and not the mysterious statutes written in all hearts, govern the world in which Henry Pelham adventures; and in this malarial, this mephitic air, the womanly gasps and perishes.

The literary technique is so much better than Scott's; the story is so much shapelier, the style so much clearer and quicker, the diction so much more accurate, that one at first feels a certain joy in escaping to it. But this soon fades, and you find yourself longing for the foolishest page of romance, for the worst of Scott, of Cooper, of Brockden Brown, of Mrs. Radcliffe, as something truer and better, after all; for these authors, at their worst, were untrue only to the manifestations of human nature, and Bulwer, at his best, misrepresents the surface of life, and he is untrue to its essence.

In the long stretch of his novels, from "Pelham," which was not the first, to "My Novel," which was not the last, but which respectively mark the extremes of his ill-doing and well-doing, there is an apparent effort to retrieve the primal error, the original sin of "Pelham." But one does not feel that Bulwer ever quite works out his redemption. Womanhood, at least, does not forgive him; or it does not countenance his work by its presence so far as to suffer him any memorable heroine. I read all his books at that most impressionable time of life when but to name a woman's name is to conjure up a phantom of delight in the young fancy; but nothing remains to me now from the multitude of his inventions in the figure of women but the vague image of the blind girl Nydia in "The Last Days of Pompeii." I think this sort of general remembrance or oblivion no bad test in such matters, and I feel pretty sure that if Bulwer had imagined any other heroine of equal authenticity I should find some trace of her charm in my memory. But I find none from the books of an author whom I once thought so brilliant and profound,

and whom I now think so solemnly empty, so imposingly unimportant. He was a clever artificer, and he is to be credited with doing much to stay the decadence of British prose in fiction, and to rebuild the British novel upon shapely lines. But in all he has written there is an air of meditated purpose, a lack of impulse, an absence of spontaneity. He meant extremely well by literature; he had ideals so tall that he enjoyed something like a moral elevation from them; he respected the novelist so highly that he wished to call him the Poet, and did call him so in his prefaces; he was a man of polite learning, or at least, of scholarly reading; he wished always to do better than he did; in the lack of artistic instincts he had artistic principles, which if mistaken were sincere; and with all he was thoroughly mediocre. He did not grow as an artist, and his "Last Days of Pompeii," which was one of his early novels, is one of his best.

III

As I have said, the blind girl Nydia remains to me from "The Last Days of Pompeii" not only chief but almost sole among Bulwer's heroines, in the sort that heroines outlive the definite recollection of their environment, their individuality, and sometimes of their very names. She is not without rivalry in her native pages: there are the Greek Ione whom the hero Glaucus loves, and the Roman Julia who loves him, and who, in the make-up of a Pompeian *grande dame*, relumes her baleful fires more distinctly under the old eyes reviewing the scenes of the story. On the other hand, however, the slave girl has to contend in this later impression with the disadvantage of being a flower girl, now after flower girls have been done so much.

But in her day flower girls in fiction were not yet so faded, and she came with such a freshness of appeal to a much simpler-hearted age than this, that youth in all ranks of life were touched and won by her. The romance, in fact, had an acceptance as great in its time as we have since given "Quo Vadis," which it is not saying much to say it surpassed in most essentials, and certainly preceded in such interest as the contrasts of late paganism and early Christianity always awaken.

Nydia fairly operates the whole action, in which the machinery creaks more audibly than it once did; but she is imagined upon old-fashioned lines of girlhood which have their charm. Like Milton's ideal of poetry, she is "simple, sensuous, passionate," and from her first meeting with Glaucus, the young Athenian swell who goes about snubbing the Latin civilization at Pompeii, she loves him. He saves her from the scourge of the savage virago who owns her, but when he has bought her he sends her to bear the declaration of his love to the beautiful Ione; and Nydia has to hear, if not to see, the tenderness of the lovers. The rich Julia makes interest with the jealous child, and they visit together a potent witch who gives the Roman a philter to win her the love of Glaucus. Nydia steals the potion and administers it herself to Glaucus; he drinks and goes mad, and during his frenzy he is implicated in the murder of Ione's brother, whom Arbaces, the Egyptian high-priest of Isis, has slain. Glaucus is condemned to the lions in the arena; but Nydia contrives to escape from the durance of Arbaces, and manages the release of the priest Calenas, who has witnessed the murder; together they rouse the good voluptuary Sallust from the morrow of a debauch and fly with him to the arena. Glaucus has already been exposed to one lion which has forborne to harm him, and has crept back into his cage,

so that Sallust appeals to the ædile in time to save the Greek. Then, as is well known, the eruption of Vesuvius takes place. Through the storm of fire Nydia and Glaucus rush to the house of Arbaces where Ione is imprisoned, and the three save themselves from the universal calamity. It must be owned that all this is a good deal for one poor Thessalian girl, a slave and blind, to do; but she has the author to her friend, and she does not fail. When her task is finished, and she finds herself on the bark which is bearing the reunited lovers back to Athens, she quietly drowns herself while they are asleep.

Though they profess to live in the first century, the characters of the story are naturally nineteenth-century people, unless indeed Glaucus speaks of Nydia, in the letter he writes Sallust from Athens, with rather the rhetorical sensibility of the eighteenth: "Our beloved, our remembered Nydia! I have reared a tomb to her shade, and I see it every day from the window of my study. It keeps alive in me a tender recollection—a not unpleasing sadness—which are but a fitting homage to her fidelity and the mysteriousness of her early death. Ione gathers the flowers, but my own hand daily wreathes them round the tomb."

By this time Ione must have suspected why, and would naturally have limited her gratitude for Nydia's self-sacrifice to gathering the flowers. If not, she must have been less or more a woman than the blind girl, whose jealousy of her is one of the truest things in a book not superabounding in true things. The situation is of the stage; and for the stage the conception of a slave girl rescued from a cruel mistress, to become the servant of the woman whose lover she loves, is not too fine. In all Bulwer's novels there is a strain which suggests that he would have been a better dramatist, or melodramatist, than novelist. But in the case of Nydia,

at least, the execution is not so good as the conception, even, and it is hard to find a passage which will do the conception justice.

"When Glaucus returned to Pompeii, Nydia had told another year of life; that year with its sorrows, its loneliness, its trials, had greatly developed her mind and heart. . . . Nydia felt suddenly, and as by revelation, that these feelings she had long and innocently cherished, were of love. . . . Sometimes she dreaded lest Glaucus should discover her secret; sometimes she felt indignant that it should *not* be suspected; it was a sign of contempt. . . . Her feelings for Ione ebbed and flowed with every hour; now she loved her because *he* did; now she hated her for the same cause. There were moments when she could have murdered her unconscious mistress, moments when she could have laid down her life for her. . . . One morning when she repaired to her usual task in the garden . . . she found Glaucus under the columns of the peristyle, with a merchant of the town; he was selecting jewels for his destined bride. . . . 'Come hither, Nydia; put down thy vase and come hither. Thou must take this chain from me—stay—there, I have put it on. There, Servillius, does it not become her?' 'Wonderfully!' answered the jeweller. . . . 'But when these ear-rings glitter in the ears of the noble Ione, *then*, by Bacchus! you will see whether my art adds anything to beauty!' 'Ione?' repeated Nydia, who had hitherto acknowledged by smiles and blushes the gift of Glaucus. 'Yes,' replied the Athenian, carelessly toying with the gems; 'I am choosing a present for Ione; but there are none worthy of her.' He was startled as he spoke by an abrupt gesture of Nydia; she tore the chain violently from her neck, and dashed it on the ground. 'How is this? Why, Nydia, dost thou not like the bauble? Art thou offended?' 'You treat me ever as a slave and

' YOU TREAT ME EVER AS A SLAVE AND A CHILD' "

a child,' replied the Thessalian, with a breast heaving with ill-suppressed sobs."

There is nature here, almost naturally expressed; but if the reader is not willing that the heroine should keep this aspect of petulant jealousy he may take leave of her in that supreme moment when Nydia acts more like a heroine and talks altogether like one. She has saved Glaucus from the lion; she has helped him save Ione from the Egyptian; she has guided him, "half leading, half carrying Ione," to the sea-shore; she has done all that a blind girl could do, and perhaps more; and now the lovers are dreaming away the terrors of yesterday in the early dawn after their escape, and the bark on which they have set sail seems to be laying its own course for the Piræus.

"In the silence of the general sleep Nydia rose gently. She bent over the face of Glaucus—she inhaled the deep breath of his heavy slumber—timidly and sadly she kissed his brow, his lips; she felt for his hand—it was locked in that of Ione; she sighed deeply and her face darkened. Again she kissed his brow, and with her hair wiped from it the damp of night. 'May the gods bless you, Athenian,' she murmured; 'may you be happy with your beloved one!—may you sometimes remember Nydia! Alas, she is of no further use on earth!' Slowly she crept along the *fori*, or platform, to the further side of the vessel, and, passing, bent low over the deep; the cool spray dashed upward over her fevered brow. 'It is the kiss of death,' she said; 'it is welcome.' The balmy air played through her waving tresses—and she raised those eyes, so tender though sightless, to the sky whose soft face she had never seen. 'No, no!' she said, half aloud, and in a musing and thoughtful tone, 'I cannot endure it; this jealous, exacting love, it shatters my whole soul in madness. . . . Oh, sacred Sea! I hear thy voice invitingly. . . . They say that

in thy embrace is dishonor—that thy victims cross not the fatal Styx. Be it so! I would not meet him in the Shades, for I should meet him still with *her!* Rest—rest—rest!—there is no other Elysium for a heart like mine!' A sailor, half dozing on the deck, heard a slight splash on the waters; drowsily he looked up, and behind, as the vessel bounded merrily on, he fancied he saw something white above the waves, but it vanished in an instant."

It may seem hard that a novelist whose fiction afterwards went so far and wide in the great English world of society and politics, should have lodged no other heroine so securely in the memory of his public as she of his early romance; but this appears to have been the fate of Bulwer. Yet, after all, it is no mean achievement. She was so well imagined, in a time when her type was fresher than now, that one's regret is rather for the heroine than the author; one wishes that she had been the creature of a talent able to do her full justice in the realization.

THE EARLIER HEROINES OF CHARLES DICKENS

I SHOULD be at a loss to say exactly why Bulwer holds in my mind some such relation to English fiction as Balzac holds to the French. Perhaps it is because they were so nearly contemporaneous in their work, and dealt in it so largely both with criminals and with swells, and both dabbled in mysticism. They were alike in theorizing about their art, and in meaning greater things than they ever did, though Balzac did so much greater things than Bulwer. They escaped together from the hold of decadent romance, but not without continuing in certain things very romanticistic. Bulwer, it is true, wrote a number of historical novels, and Balzac wrote one or two novels (notably "Eugénie Grandet" and "César Birotteau"), almost purely realistic, and of a truth never approached by Bulwer in any of the stories where he tried so hard for the likeness of life. Another talent, far greater than he, and of a quality still unique in English literature, resembled Balzac in the employment of bizarre and eccentric characters, while he led all the other romanticists in the use of such effectisms as people keeping their identity concealed through a whole action, or good people masking as bad people, or clever persons sustaining the part of foolish persons, in order to confound the wicked. Of course I am speaking of Charles Dickens, a mighty imagination, whose vices grew upon him with his

virtues, under the immense favor he almost instantly achieved.

I

In the characterization of women I do not think Dickens ever struck a truer note than in some of his very earliest heroines, who were so much more real than the more elaborate figures that follow them in interminable procession through the long perspective of his fiction. The scheme of his first novel, if "Pickwick Papers" can be called a novel, is so desultory that the young ladies in it have little to do in bringing about its comedy closes, and are there, in such action as they share, solely for the purpose of being pretty and provoking, and ensnaring the hearts of their lovers, and then being easily won by them. This is not a very high conception of woman's business in the world, but so very many women seem to be in the world for nothing else that we can hardly blame those who are restricted to it in fiction. It is to be said in their defence, besides, that when Dickens began to draw women of a different type, he did not seem to get them so true; he made us believe in them by dint of appealing to our consciences or our sensibilities, and he achieved a moral rather than an artistic triumph in heroines who are for our good rather than our pleasure.

After all, though, why should not Arabella Allen and Emily Wardle be for our good, too? They are nice girls, of the true Anglo-Saxon tradition in heroines. But their innocent lures are more obvious than those of Jane Austen's or Frances Burney's nice girls; they are something more of romps, and were such girls as the young reporter had probably himself known in the society which he then frequented. At the Christmas festivities, where we first meet Miss Allen, she is a guest

of the hospitable Wardle household which comes out to meet Mr. Pickwick and his friends, and is "the black-eyed young lady in a very nice little pair of boots with fur round the top," who was "observed to scream very loudly when Mr. Winkle offered to help her over" the stile. At an allusion to an approaching marriage this "young lady with the black eyes and the fur round the boots whispered something in Emily's ear, and then glanced archly at Mr. Snodgrass." In the evening, after the dance, when it was a question of being kissed under the mistletoe, and the young ladies all "screamed and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated, and did everything but leave the room, . . . Mr. Winkle kissed the young lady with the black eyes, and Mr. Snodgrass kissed Emily." Several chapters later, when the Pickwickians are again at Manor Farm, Miss Allen is still there, and at the pond where they all go to skate she urges Mr. Winkle to skate, and then is not ashamed of him for having pretended to know how, and fallen down on the ice, and had his skates ignominiously taken off him by Mr. Pickwick's order. After this it is only an affair of time, and not much time, as to her elopement with Mr. Winkle, whose father provisionally disowns him till he decides to see Arabella, and judge of his son's folly for himself. "'Arabella's tears flowed fast, as she pleaded in extenuation that she was young and inexperienced; . . . that she had been deprived of the counsel and guidance of her parents almost from infancy. 'It was my fault, all my fault, sir,' replied poor Arabella, weeping. 'Nonsense,' said the old gentleman, 'it was not your fault that he fell in love with you, I suppose. Yes, it was, though,' said the old gentleman, looking rather shyly at Arabella. 'It *was* your fault; he couldn't help it.'"

All this is supposed to have happened when our century was in its early thirties, and people took life much

less psychologically than they do now, and had spirits for anything. "Pickwick Papers" themselves seem the effect of the most robust high spirits, sometimes the most resolute high spirits, as we read them in this late twilight, and wonder a little what used to make us laugh so much. A serious heroine, or even a heroine seriously treated, would have been out of place in that rollicking atmosphere, and Arabella Allen does better than a finer personality. As for the love-making, there is none to the reader's direct knowledge, and only inferentially a little at the Christmas dance, when the absence of the lovers keeps the music waiting. "'Where's Arabella Allen?' cried a dozen voices. 'And Winkle?' added Mr. Tupman. 'Here we are!' exclaimed that gentleman, emerging with his pretty companion from the corner; as he did so it would have been hard to tell which was the redder in the face, he or the young lady with the black eyes. 'What an extraordinary thing it is, Winkle,' said Mr. Pickwick, rather pettishly, 'that you couldn't have taken your place before.' 'Not at all extraordinary,' said Mr. Winkle. 'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a very expressive smile, as his eyes rested upon Arabella — 'well, I don't know that it *was* extraordinary, either, after all.'"

II

The love in "Pickwick Papers" is, in fact, all ready-made; but there is no subtlety in the author that leaves you in doubt of its being love. He put on subtlety enough of all sorts afterwards, except of the sort that really conceals something, and that is perhaps why he became and remains such a universal favorite, for there is nothing that the average novel-reader (who is nearly as low an intelligence as the average play-goer) likes

ARABELLA ALLEN AND EMILY WARDLE

so much as a deep mystery which he is in the secret of. Dickens attempted something finer in his next novel than anything he tried in "Pickwick Papers," and in "Nicholas Nickleby" we have the choice of two heroines, Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray, who are as far as possible from the elemental arts of Arabella Allen, but who exist more to touch than to take the reader's heart. We have no longer the pure comedy of "Pickwick Papers," but the tragedy is not so good as the comedy in "Nicholas Nickleby," and the farcical people are all more real, grotesque caricatures as they mostly are, than the serious people. Of the women, Mrs. Nickleby is the most vital, and yet in the part of absolute fool Mrs. Nickleby is not to be spoken of in the same breath with Mrs. Bennet in "Pride and Prejudice." Her folly is burlesqued, and the charm of Mrs. Bennet's folly is that it is never burlesqued. You can always go back to the book and laugh at her as gladly any time as the first time; but your pleasure in Mrs. Nickleby soon passes. You get the trick of her, the parenthetical incoherence which Dickens worked afterwards in Flora Casby, Mrs. Lirriper, David Copperfield's landlady, Mrs. Plornish, and I do not know how many others, and then, if one is not in one's prime, she very quickly stales. In my own prime, however, I used to take my life in my hand, so killingly funny I found it all, when I ventured to read of the mad gentleman next door, throwing vegetables over the wall as a token of his love for Mrs. Nickleby, and afterwards scrambling down her chimney in further proof of his passion, and being pulled out over the grate and dropped floundering on the floor by Frank Cheeryble.

"'Oh, yes, yes,' said Kate, directly the whole figure of this singular visitor appeared in this abrupt manner. 'I know who it is. . . . Is he hurt? I hope not—oh, pray, see if he is hurt.' 'He is not, I assure you,'

said Frank, handling the object of his surprise, after this appeal, with sudden tenderness and respect. . . . 'But may I ask you what this means, and whether you expected this old gentleman?' 'Oh, no,' said Kate; 'of course not; but he—mamma does not think so, I believe—but he is a mad gentleman who has escaped from the next house, and must have found an opportunity of secreting himself there.' 'Kate,' interposed Mrs. Nickleby, with severe dignity, 'I am surprised at you. . . . I am quite astonished that you should join the persecutors of this unfortunate gentleman. . . . You ought not to allow your feelings to be influenced; it's not right, very far from it. What should my feelings be, do you suppose? If anybody ought to be indignant, who is it? I, of course, and very properly so. Still, at the same time, I wouldn't commit such an injustice for the world. No,' continued Mrs. Nickleby, drawing herself up and looking another way with a kind of bashful stateliness, 'this gentleman will understand me when I tell him that I repeat the answer I gave the other day—that I always will repeat it, though I do believe him to be sincere when I find him placing himself in such dreadful situations on my account—and that I request him to go away immediately. . . . I am obliged to him, very much obliged to him, but I cannot listen to his addresses for a moment. It's quite impossible.' . . . The old gentleman, with his nose and cheeks embellished with large patches of soot, sat upon the ground with his arms folded, eying the spectators in profound silence, and with a very majestic demeanor. He did not take the smallest notice of what Mrs. Nickleby had said, but when she had ceased to speak he honored her with a long stare and inquired if she had quite finished. 'I have nothing more to say,' replied that lady modestly. . . . 'Very good,' said the old gentleman, raising his voice, 'then bring

in the bottled lightning, a clean tumbler, and a corkscrew.' Nobody executing this order, the old gentleman, after a short pause, raised his voice again, and demanded a thunder sandwich. This article not being forthcoming, either, he requested to be served with fricassee of boot-tops and gold-fish sauce, and then, laughing heartily, he gratified his hearers with a very long, loud, and melodious bellow. But still Mrs. Nickleby, in reply to the significant looks of those about her, shook her head as though to assure them that she saw nothing in all this, unless indeed it were a slight degree of eccentricity."

III

When some misgivings of the infallibility of Dickens's wonderful powers began to insinuate themselves among his worshippers, certain of the more candid were inclined to own that he might err on the side of pathos, but held that on the side of humor really he was without sin. Yet it cannot be denied that there was always a touch of horse-play in his humor, and at times it was all horse-play. It grew better, it grew finer, there is no denying that, either, but at the very end it was not the best, not the finest humor. His pathos was not the finest pathos, but that improved in quality, too, and the pathos of his latest books is no such swash of sentimentality as flooded the readers of "Old Curiosity Shop." A whole generation, on either side of the Atlantic, used to fall sobbing at the name of Little Nell, which will hardly bring tears to the eyes of any one now, though it is still apparent that the child was imagined with real feeling, and her sad little melodrama was staged with sympathetic skill. When all is said against the lapses of taste and truth, the notion of the young girl wandering up and down the country with her

demented grandfather, and meeting good and evil fortune with the same devotion, till death overtakes her, is something that must always touch the heart. It is preposterously overdone, yes, and the author himself falls into pages of hysterical rhythm, which once moved people, when he ought to have been writing plain, straight prose; yet there is in all a sense of the divinity in common and humble lives, which is the most precious quality of literature, as it is almost the rarest, and it is this which moves and consoles. It is this quality in Dickens which Tolstoy prizes and accepts as proof of his great art, and which the true critic must always set above any effect of literary mastery. It remained with Dickens to the last, and long after success had spoiled him and made him conscious. He still had it, and could impart it, but not so sweetly and purely as in the poor, rude people among whom Little Nell and her grandfather wandered till she died, and who opened their hearts to her helplessness with a tenderness that the reader cannot but share. She lives in this compassion, and not in the shadowy and purposeless objectivity which the author gives her.

IV

In "Oliver Twist" Dickens goes on to another ideal in Nancy Sykes, who, like Little Nell, is a heroine by default, for the book has no other, though it is duly supplied in Rose Maylie with the sort of sexless lay-figure, with a semblance of personality, which he learned more and more to arrive at. The story is not so loosely contrived as that of "Old Curiosity Shop," but it is not easy to find out why any one, rather than another, does this or that in it, and the best that can be said of Nancy is that her function is more distinct and her presence

THE DEATH OF NANCY SYKES

more reasonably accounted for than some others'. First she is useful in trapping little Oliver, and getting him back into the power of Fagin, the Jewish professor of petty larceny, and then she is useful in repentantly saving him from a life of crime, and restoring him to his friends. But her chief office is to illustrate the constancy of woman's nature by her devotion to the burglar, her brutal paramour, and to die by his hand when he suspects her of treachery. It cannot be said that she is convincingly identified with her class in manner or parlance; all the attempts so to characterize her are limp and crude; we must take her upon faith, and believe, because the author tells us so, that a girl of her hapless sort would speak and act as she does. In fact, she is evolved, as a personality, from a convention of lost womanhood, and is clothed and colored by the author's fancy to the effect we were once all so familiar with. She is helped out with tremendous situations and grisly catastrophes, and she dies a death of blood-curdling horror at the hands of her lover, which has so often been represented on the stage that she might well seem native there. Yet, for the theatre, where it belongs, the scene is, as such things go, potently imagined, and we may look upon it once more, supposing the lights down and the quivering violins muted, and realize the greatness of the author's strictly melodramatic gift.

"He had roused her from her sleep, for she raised herself up with a hurried and startled look. 'Get up!' said the man. 'It *is* you, Bill!' said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return. 'It is,' was the reply. 'Get up.' . . . 'Bill,' said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, 'why do you look like that at me?' The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and, looking once towards the

door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth. 'Bill, Bill!' gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear—'I—I won't scream or cry—not once—hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done!' 'You know, you she-devil!' returned the robber, suppressing his breath. 'You were watched to-night; every word you said was heard.' 'Then spare my life, for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours,' rejoined the girl, clinging to him. 'Bill, dear Bill, you cannot have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up, only this one night, for you. You *shall* have time to think, and save yourself this crime; I will not loose my hold, you cannot throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God's sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!' The man struggled violently to release his arms; but those of the girl were clasped round his, and tear her as he would he could not tear them away. 'Bill,' cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast, 'the gentleman, and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you, and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time!' The housebreaker freed one arm and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice, with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own. She staggered and fell; nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with

difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie's own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker. It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer, staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down."

HEROINES OF CHARLES DICKENS'S MIDDLE PERIOD

I HAVE compunctions (which I am not sure I shall find just, on examination) for having passed over Dickens's earlier books without mentioning certain of his womenkind who have found a place in our associations with his name, or have achieved a sort of independent existence in proverb. I mean such surcharged travesties as Fanny Squeers and Tilly Price and Miss La Creevy in "Nicholas Nickleby"; such grotesques as Sally Brass in "Old Curiosity Shop," and the elderly Miss Wardle in "Pickwick Papers"; such frantic burlesques as abound in "Oliver Twist." But even if I were to hold myself to stricter account in cataloguing these than I have found necessary, I should not feel justified in citing them as heroines; and I hope not to have a bad conscience in ignoring now and hereafter the innumerable freaks and monsters with which the author peoples his page and to which he wildly and whirlingly attributes the sex and nature of women.

I

In any just sense there is no heroine in "Barnaby Rudge," which is a book of more skill and power than any that Dickens had yet written. We may dismiss without self-reproach such a ladylike lay-figure as

Emma Haredale, and a goblin effigy like Miss Miggs, and come without delay to Dolly Varden, who, in turn, need hardly delay us longer. She is a cheap little coquette, imagined upon the commonest lines, with abundant assertion as to her good looks and graces, but without evidence of the charm that the silliest flirt has in reality. She is nothing and she does nothing; and she cannot be petted and patted by her inventor, with all his fondness, into any semblance of personality. Dickens, however, had himself such potent charm that what he said went, at least with his own generation; and so Dolly Varden passed for a pretty girl such as in life knows how to snare the hearts of men, and play with them and throw them away. Perhaps the falsest note in her was her supposed capability of deep regret for the love she had trifled with and a final constancy to it; but we were told this was so, and we obediently imagined it.

Now that we have lived beyond the glamour of Dickens's wonderful power, it is incredible what things we were asked and made to believe by him. It was like a kind of game, such as children play together, in which it is pretended that things are so and so, without reference to any inherent probability or possibility; and the power of the master of the revels was so great that when you came under his spell you were glad to be under it, and did not question the means by which he worked his wonders, any more than children do in playing a game.

It cannot be denied that he refined upon his means, though the trick remained essentially the same, as he wrote more and more. But he was always and inalienably of the theatre, and as one reads his novels now it is with an immense regret that he did not frankly make them plays. His melodrama then might have seemed drama; his stage scenery aspects of nature, so much

less would his faults have appeared in plays than they do in novels.

II

A certain difference is noticeable in the novels which Dickens began to write after his visit to America, though it cannot be pretended that the change was an effect of his visit. Rather it was an effect of his maturing talent and his growing self-knowledge. He was still so far from maturity that he did not create any feminine character (however misshapen or idealized) till he gave us Mrs. Dombey and her mother, Mrs. Skewton, in "Dombey and Son." Even in these he could not tame his superabounding spirits to the work of ascertaining their nature and representing it. They were in a sort characters, but they were without limitations, and they impersonated the frenzied excess of his fancy in the direction of the qualities ascribed to them. Not before "David Copperfield" did any novel of Dickens offer that last proof of ripened powers which only a true heroine attests. In "Martin Chuzzlewit," which followed hard upon his return home from America, and which hastily embodied in fiction the impressions of his sojourn among us, there is no heroine, though there are a multitude of caricatures in women's clothes and with women's names, and falsetto suggestions of women's natures in the minor and meaner qualities assigned to them. Some of these are English and some are American, and the author simple-heartedly expected that the Americans would like the last because the first were quite as monstrous. His error is no part of his condemnation, and in fact he is not to be condemned at all for the abnormal creatures of his fancy: Mrs. Hominy and Mrs. Major Pawkins are certainly no worse than Sairey Gamp and Betsey Prig, and we could once laugh

equally at them all, though now the laughing is more difficult than the liking. Our preference must be for the English inventions, with which at least their inventor is more at home, and whose accents he distinguishes more successfully. As always, the light is the light of the footlights and the setting is that of the theatre; the whole affair is operated almost as openly as in the new ventriloquism of the vaudeville stage, where the actor-dramatist stands behind his row of puppets, and with his hand now on this and now on that supplies the dialogue and imparts the appropriate action, which he sometimes renders extraordinarily life-like at the end by walking off the stage arm in arm with the principal puppet.

What has become of all the delight that was once in these things? The fun of the printed page is no less obvious; the old materials of laughter are there; but somehow the convention by which we agreed to split our sides at the grotesquery of Sairey Gamp and Betsey Prig is disabled, and in its broken condition Dickens can no more make us smile than Rabelais himself. There must have been something in the air of that time, gone from this, by which he had power upon us; and in every age some great novelist has like power at which the next generation incredulously wonders.

III

It is doubtful if the pathos of Little Paul or Florence Dombey could make us cry, now, though it used to wring tears from all eyes, and we could not find the hysterical emotion of the author in working it up a sob or a sigh too much. We did not, in fact, blame his art in any way, we who were his true lieges, but were glad of all his fustian in portraying the alienation of the

proud Edith Dombey from her arrogant husband. We gratefully exulted in her design of wounding Dombey in the tenderest place by eloping with his confidential man Carker, and then in turn mocking the hopes of the traitor and flinging his guilty love in his teeth. We followed with panting eagerness every advance of the plot, and gasped for breath in that high climax where Mrs. Dombey, safe away from her husband in France, suddenly unmasked her hatred to her would-be paramour; even yet we cannot help seeing what a tremendously telling scene it would be on the stage.

"As the sound of Carker's fastening the door resounded through the intermediate rooms, and seemed to come hushed and stifled into that last one, the sound of the Cathedral clock striking twelve mingled with it, in Edith's ears. She heard him pause, as if he heard it too and listened; and then come back towards her, laying a long train of footsteps through the silence, and shutting all the doors behind him as he came along. Her hand, for a moment, left the velvet chair to bring a knife within her reach upon the table; then she stood as she had stood before. . . . 'I have never,' resumed Carker, 'seen you look so handsome as you do to-night.' . . . He was coming gayly towards her, when, in an instant, she caught the knife up from the table and started one pace back. 'Stand still!' she said, 'or I shall murder you!' The sudden change in her, the towering fury and intense abhorrence sparkling in her eyes and lighting up her brow, made him stop as if a fire had stopped him. 'Stand still!' she said, 'come no nearer me, upon your life!' They both stood looking at each other. Rage and astonishment were in his face, but he controlled them, and said lightly, 'Come, come! Tush! we are alone, and out of everybody's sight and hearing. Do you think to frighten me with those tricks of virtue?' 'Do you think to

"'STAND STILL!' SHE SAID, 'OR I SHALL MURDER YOU'

frighten *me*,' she answered, fiercely, 'from any purpose that I have, and any course I am resolved upon, by reminding me of the solitude of this place and there being no help near? Me, who am here alone, designedly? If I feared you, should I not have avoided you? If I feared you, should I be here, in the dead of night, telling you to your face what I am going to tell?' . . . 'Do you mistake me for your husband?' he retorted, with a grin. Disdaining to reply, she stretched her arm out, pointing to the chair. He bit his lip, laughed, and sat down in it, with an impatient air he was unable to conceal; and biting his nail nervously, and looking at her sideways, with bitter discomfiture, even while he feigned to be amused by her caprice. She put the knife down upon the table, and, touching her bosom with her hand, said: 'I have something lying here that is no love trinket; and sooner than endure your touch once more I would use it on you—and you know it, while I speak—with less reluctance than I would on any other creeping thing that lives.' He affected to laugh jestingly, and entreated her to act her play out quickly, for the supper was growing cold. But the secret look with which he regarded her was more sullen and lowering, and he struck his foot once upon the floor with a muttered oath. 'How many times,' said Edith, bending her darkest glance upon him, 'has your bold knavery assailed me with outrage and insult? How many times in your smooth manner and mocking words and looks have I been twitted with my courtship and my marriage? . . . From my marriage day I found myself exposed to such new shame—to such solicitation and pursuit (expressed as clearly as if it had been written in the coarsest words, and thrust into my hand at every turn) from one mean villain, that I felt as if I had never known humiliation till that time. This shame my husband fixed upon me; hemmed me round with,

himself; steeped me in, with his own hands, and of his own act, repeated hundreds of times. And thus—forced by the two from every point of rest I had, . . . driven from each to each, and beset by one when I escaped the other—my anger rose almost to distraction against both. I do not know against which it rose higher—the master or the man!' He watched her closely, as she stood before him in the very triumph of her indignant beauty. She was resolute, he saw; undauntable; with no more fear of him than of a worm. 'But if I tell you that the lightest touch of your hand makes my blood cold with antipathy; that from the hour when I first saw and hated you, to now, when my instinctive repugnance is enhanced by every minute's knowledge of you I have since had, you have been a loathsome creature to me which has not its like on earth—how then? . . . We meet and part to-night,' she said. 'You have fallen on Sicilian days and sensual rest, too soon.' 'Edith!' he retorted, menacing her with his hand 'Sit down! Have done with this! What devil possesses you?' 'Their name is Legion,' she replied, uprearing her proud form as if she would have crushed him; 'you and your master have raised them in a fruitful house, and they shall tear you both. . . . In every vaunt you make, I have my triumph. I single out in you the meanest man I know, the parasite and tool of the proud tyrant, that his wound may go the deeper and may rankle more. Boast, and revenge me on him! You know how you came here to-night; you know how you stand cowering there; you see yourself in colors quite as despicable, if not as odious, as those in which I see you. Boast then, and revenge me on yourself.' The foam was on his lips; the wet stood on his forehead. If she would have faltered once, for only one half-moment, he would have pinioned her; but she was as firm as rock, and her searching eyes never

left him. 'We don't part so,' he said. 'Do you think I am drivelling, to let you go in your mad temper?' 'Do you think,' she answered, 'that I am to be stayed?' 'I'll try, my dear,' he said, with a ferocious gesture of his head. 'God's mercy on you, if you try by coming near me!' she replied. . . . 'Come!' and his teeth fairly shone again. 'We must make a treaty of this, or *I* may take some unexpected course. Sit down, sit down!' . . . He did not venture to advance towards her; but the door by which he had entered was behind him, and he stepped back to lock it. 'Lastly, take my warning! look to yourself!' she said, and smiled again. 'You have been betrayed, as all betrayers are. It has been made known that you are in this place, or were to be, or have been. If I live, I saw my husband in a carriage in the street to-night!' 'Strumpet, it's false!' cried Carker. At the moment, the bell rang loudly in the hall. He turned white, as she held her hand up like an enchantress, at whose invocation the sound had come. 'Hark! do you hear it?'"

IV

This would be a great scene on the stage, I say, but it is in no wise the language or the attitude of life. It is not necessary to say that the whole thing is impossible, almost from beginning to end. As impossibilities go, however, it is not a bad one; is not wholly a piece of effectism. The woman's hatred of her husband is imaginable enough, and she might well wish to make the means of her humiliation the means of his shame; but only in the theatre could the chances of worse be so successfully and triumphantly safeguarded.

Edith Dombey is the first of that deadly-haughty line of heroines which Dickens afterwards prolonged through

many of his novels; and in much of the other characterizations in "Dombey and Son" he achieved novelty and increasing verity. There are no longer such mere monstrosities in the personifications. Each, of course, is furnished with a trick by which you know him or her, and by this trick each is worked more or less, but still the figures have greater reality and initiative; they have mostly a genuine function, and they contribute to the evolution of the plot by fulfilling their function; they are not merely there to amuse themselves or the reader.

It is in the tragedy and the pathos that the author oftenest falls down, as we now perceive, though the time was when Macaulay, the historian and critic, cried over Florence Dombey, as he has himself recorded, in inconsolable heart-break. This is the more wonderful because Macaulay, more than any other, had felt the incomparable fineness of Jane Austen's art. It must be that the critical fibre of the British public, never too sensitive, had been coarsened by a whole generation of romanticistic fiction, until the bearing on and rubbing in of Dickens was not only not an affliction, but a positive delight. He could not help bearing on and rubbing in, even in the case so delicately imagined as that of the little girl neglected and ignored by her father; he must make her a good monster as he makes the father a bad monster; and as he makes monsters, in their several kinds, of Susan Nipper and Miss Blimber and "good" Mrs. Brown and her daughter Alice and Mrs. Chick and Mrs. MacStinger and Mrs. Pipchin and Mrs. Toodle and Miss Tox and the other pieces in the game. They are each reduced to a single quality and propensity, and then intensified out of all nature; and yet in their conception they are genuine and probable enough. This is especially true of Mrs. Dombey, who is for a while not overworked in her specialty of haughty

DORA COPPERFIELD

revolt against her husband's hauteur. She is a sincere nature, and abhors the hollow, husband-hunting life which the hideous old coquette, her mother, has led her; and there are hints of noble tragedy in her love and pity for her husband's neglected daughter Florence. But the tender beauty of this reality is sacrificed to the gross ends of melodrama, and Edith's characterization ends in blue fire and muted violins, as we have seen. Still, she was the first semblance of a heroine that Dickens had contrived.

V

In "David Copperfield" there are perhaps as many monsters as in "Dombey and Son," but they are not so merely monsters, and there are many more personalities. The first of these is David's poor, pretty young widowed mother, who in her hapless second marriage is very tenderly and truly portrayed, and the next are David's successive and contrasted wives, Dora Spenlow and Agnes Wickfield. Mrs. Steerforth, in her proud love of her son, is also a personality; so, in a way, is the faithful Peggotty; so is Miss Murdstone; so, in less measure, is Little Emily; so is Miss Trotwood; so is Rosa Dartle.

This is not saying that these personalities are not every one overdone, and at times each carried to the verge of monstrosity; but the autobiographical form of the novel seems somehow to have held the author in check, and saved him in some measure from his besetting sin of excess. It remains the best of his novels, the shapeliest, the sanest; and the necessity which he was in, through the form, of working out character inductively, kept him truer to what he had seen of life. In no other book, probably, did he draw so much and so directly from life. It was autobiographical in fact

as well as in form, and it was biographical through the introduction, with little disguise, of Dickens's father and family circumstance. Through subsequent study of its origins, the point where the fiction begins in most cases has been ascertained, but there is always a borderland where such figures move unconscious whether they are quite fiction or fact. No doubt they are always much more fiction than fact; the autobiography of David Copperfield is so transmuted that it is no longer Dickens's autobiography; and probably, if there was any living original for Dora Spenlow, Dora Spenlow bears her far less allegiance than Flora Casby, in "Our Mutual Friend," bears Dora Spenlow, whom Dickens ultimated in her.

All this does not in the least matter. The question is of the treatment of such a nature as Dora's, and the affair being that of a first love, in which anything fantastic may happen, the answer to the question seems to be that the author has given us here perhaps his first entirely living heroine. It is one of the saving facts concerning a talent who left his adorers several things to regret, that he had beyond any other novelist the inspiration of innocent young girlhood. At times it was almost *little* girlhood that inspired him, so sexless do such natures, or supernatures, as Florence Dombey and Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit appear. He predicates marriage of them, and contrives a shadowy wooing for them, however incredibly and almost shockingly; but Dora has sex, and the witchery of it; childish and slight as she is, she is a woman, with a woman's, not an angel's, charm. She is not more innocent than David himself, and she is quite as passionately in love, in their mutually innocent way, as he; she is as immediately in love, and wants him as badly as he wants her. I do not know in all fiction a purer study of young love, of the entirely human sort, than their courtship;

and it is a pity that it has to go off into the pathos of her early death after her marriage. It is true that it was no true solution of life's problem for David; and in the background all the while, is Agnes Wickfield, waiting for her innings. But a truer art than Dickens's, or Dickens's time (these things are apparently chronical, rather than personal, in great measure), would have recognized a higher duty than the reader's comfort in the situation. A child-wife is really quite as likely to live as to die; and she is apt to outlive her husband and to marry again. This was what David's mother did; and it might have been better for fiction to testify merely of the indefinitely continued marriage of the young lovers. That might not have done so badly. David was good, and Dora, after all, though she was spoiled, was sweet, and of a final good sense.

DICKENS'S LATER HEROINES

"DAVID COPPERFIELD" was a shapelier book than any that Dickens had yet written, or, for that matter, than any he was yet to write; though "Hard Times," "A Tale of Two Cities," and "Great Expectations" all had more form than his other novels. In fact, he seems to have done most of his best in "David Copperfield," and least of his worst. He set himself to represent life as the hero lived it and witnessed it, and the terms of his intention were such that he could not always stray very wide of it. In spite of his Gothic tendency to grotesque and monstrous decoration, he did something primarily structural for once; and though certain parts of the work were overlaid with adventitious and impertinent episodes, it was not weakened by them. It comes together in the retrospect; it does not straggle about or tumble apart; one can almost recall it as a whole. The characters obey the law of the comprehensive yet coherent story, and have an uncommon logic and unity. They are sometimes, of course, personifications of this or that quality, this or that propensity; but very often they are persons, and very real persons.

I

Dora Spenlow is as little dependent upon any mechanical means for recognition as much more important conceptions of Dickens's, though when it comes to

importance, I do not know why she should not be considered important, if in art the question is not of what the thing is, but how the thing is done. Perhaps the natural exuberance of Dickens is less unnatural in the affair of young love than it is in other matters, and certainly it is less offensive; one is willing to stand it, though always with the doubt whether a sense of the rapture and the bliss could not have been as perfectly imparted in saner terms. Still, it is all very sweet, and essentially it is all very true. The identity of Dora is admirably preserved; with comparatively little insistence upon the trick of her, she is kept vividly present; and she is herself quite to the end. To be sure, there is a measure of make-believe required; you are expected to suppose that a human creature, capable of being taught polite accomplishments, of playing a part in society, and of imagining self-devotion in love and marriage, can be otherwise rather less than a child; but women are of all impossible kinds, and perhaps Dora is of as possible a sort as some others. The charm of her does not cease with courtship; after her marriage she is more intoxicating, to the reader at least, than before; and though one may have known her for forty years—it is nearer fifty years, in a certain case—the charm does not stale. The tragicomedy of their young housekeeping is as funny as ever, and the comitragedy of David's attempts to turn Dora to any serious account, as sad. The humor of it all is very lovely, but is so pervasive and so diffused in the story that it can scarcely be detached for proof in a separate passage; and I think that the following passage is merely as well as another. It presents the scene between David and Dora when, after his aunt has lost her money, he goes to tell her, and release her, if she wishes, from her engagement.

"Dora came to the drawing-room door to meet me;

and Jip came scrambling out, tumbling over his own growls, under the impression that I was a bandit; and we all three went in, as happy and loving as could be. I soon carried desolation into the bosom of our joys—not that I meant to do it, but that I was so full of the subject—by asking Dora, without the smallest preparation, if she could love a beggar? My pretty, little startled Dora! Her only association with the word was a yellow face and a night-cap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or a dog with a decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind; and she stared at me with the most delightful wonder. 'How can you ask me anything so foolish?' pouted Dora. 'Love a beggar!' 'Dora, my own dearest!' said I. '*I* am a beggar!' 'How can you be such a silly thing,' replied Dora, slapping my hand, 'as to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you! I declare I'll make Jip bite you!' said Dora, shaking her curls, 'if you are so ridiculous.' But I looked so serious that Dora left off shaking her curls, and laid her trembling little hand upon my shoulder, and first looked scared and anxious, and then began to cry. . . . Then I told her with my arms clasped round her, how I loved her, so dearly, and so dearly; how I felt it right to offer to release her from her engagement, because now I was poor. . . . 'Is your heart mine still, dear Dora?' said I, rapturously, for I knew by her clinging to me that it was. Oh, yes!' cried Dora. 'Oh, yes, it's all yours. Oh, don't be dreadful!' *I* dreadful! To Dora! 'Don't talk about being poor and working hard!' said Dora, nestling closer to me. I drew a picture of our frugal home, made independent by my labor—sketching in the little house I had seen at Highgate, and my aunt in her room up-stairs. 'I am not dreadful now, Dora?' said I, tenderly. 'Oh, no, no!' cried Dora. 'But I hope your aunt will keep her own room a good deal! And I

hope she's not a scolding old thing!' . . . 'My love, no. Perseverance and strength of character will enable us to bear much worse things.' 'But I haven't got any strength at all,' said Dora, shaking her curls. 'Have I, Jip? Oh, do kiss Jip, and be agreeable!' It was impossible to resist kissing Jip, when she held him up to me for that purpose, putting her own bright, rosy little mouth into kissing form, as she directed the operation, which she insisted should be performed symmetrically, on the centre of his nose. I did as she bade me—rewarding myself afterwards for my obedience—and she charmed me out of my graver character for I don't know how long. 'But, Dora, my beloved!' said I, at last resuming it; 'I was going to mention something. . . . If you will sometimes think—not despondingly, you know; far from that!—but if you will sometimes think—just to encourage yourself—that you are engaged to a poor man—' 'Don't, don't! Pray don't!" cried Dora. 'It's so very dreadful.'"

All this is very pretty and very winning. But one is aware, as one reads, of joining in the make-believe; one knows that given these very characters, in that very situation, it would not have happened just so; though if it had happened so upon the stage, it would have been delightful, and would have seemed very lifelike.

II

When it is a question of Little Emily and her betrayal in the same story, or of Agnes Wickfield and her long tacit love for David, the affair is still further from nature. The part which each of these is forced to play limits her to the expression of a single intention of the author, without regard to the complexity of motive, the contrariety of action, recognizable in every human being. It

is happily not possible that a girl like Agnes, however good and high, shall patiently see the man she loves give himself to another woman, and live in tender sisterly friendship with the wife till she dies, and then inherit the husband with the confession that she has always loved him. This is not only impossible, but love being the simple, selfish, honest thing it is, the pretence is odious, and even repulsive. Neither is it credible that a girl like Emily, all humility, all sincerity, all unselfishness, shall become the prey of her pure love for her seducer. Without some alloy of vanity, of duplicity, of self-love in her it cannot happen, and never did happen since woman began to stoop to folly. To have made Agnes and Emily without the defects of their qualities is to have made them half-natures, half-persons, and æsthetically altogether inferior to such whole natures, whole persons, as Dora and as Rosa Dartle. There is more truth, there is more true art, in Rosa's outburst of furious and revengeful hate against Emily because she has loved Steerforth than in all the long-drawn tragedy of Emily's betrayal.

Rosa Dartle is the second of the deadly-haughty heroines whom Dickens first discovered or invented in Edith Dombey, and whom he elaborated to the last degree in Lady Dedlock, who is, more than any one else, the heroine of "Bleak House." She is a tremendously effective figure, as she is seen against the background of her mysterious past, with the shadow of a guilty love dimly present in it, and in the foreground the offspring of that love, the journalizing Esther Summerson, forever gelatinously quivering on the verge of discovering her secret, but withheld by her mother's pride and shame. Till the curtain is rung down you abandon yourself to the luxury of the illusion, the transport of the make-believe; but when you have got on your rubbers and overcoat, and found your umbrella, and the ushers are beginning to

flap the seats up and to look for missing articles on the floor, Lady Dedlock has already ceased to convince, and you are aware of her washing the paint off in the dressing-room.

There is vastly more reality in Mrs. Lou Bounderby in "Hard Times," but the probabilities are in favor of her going off with James Harthouse, rather than of her taking refuge in her father's house from both her husband and her lover. In this novel, as in all the fiction of its author, the means of any effect to be accomplished are so far beyond the requisite that one is inclined to ask with the Irishman challenged to astonishment at the prodigious fall of water at Niagara, "What's to hinder it?" There is a glut of material, ethical, emotional, economic, and political, in "Hard Times," of which the moral that you must not leave fancy and affection out of life enforces itself by the mere statement; and the wonder would be that anything less happens than could possibly happen. Yet in spite of this plethora, the book has more affinity with the actual world than most other novels of Dickens. He bears on, he rubs in here, as always, as everywhere; he never could hold his hand, and we of the generation who adored him must have been thick-skinned and coarse-fibred beyond all present imagination not to have felt it a heavy affliction. We did not feel it such; every repeated pressure lulled and delighted us; and there was no make-believe too frantically impossible for us to join in. In "A Tale of Two Cities," where Lucie Manette passes for the heroine, we worshipfully accepted the atrocious and abominable notion of Sidney Carton seeking to be guillotined in place of the husband of the woman he loves. In "Great Expectations," we eagerly agreed to the proposition of a woman, defeated of marriage, and keeping all her life long her bridal-room in the decaying appointments of her wedding-day, who, against her own will, perverted

and poisoned the nature of her adopted daughter, but not so finally that Estella (who passes for the heroine of the story) does not give herself in true love to the boyish lover of her childhood.

It would be injustice as gross as these ridiculous fables to pretend that they were all, or more than the beginning, or a very small part of either story. The sorcery which wrought the preposterous ends was of such a force, somehow, that a world lived by it in every book: not the world of men and women we know, but a world of characteristics, of propensities, of purposes singly impersonated and active to a single end; and in all these and around them was accumulated such vast wealth of action and situation that to refuse it was to leave one's self poorer than one could well afford to be.

Probably so long as any fiction can last that of Dickens will remain a monument of the contemporary excess alike in author and in reader. It will stand like some vast, fantastic structure, left aside by the course of art, and visited by the curious student of our century with amaze for the age that could have found it beautiful, but not without a certain awe for the mighty talent which reared it with such unbridled strength in obedience to the forces animating the long revolt of romanticism against the classical conventions. The revolution must waste with fire and sword, but its works are not the patterns and the examples of after-time: these will always be the things done in the serene veracity which is the sole law of beauty and lord of all moods and times. We need not totally condemn the mistaken achievements of a false taste in an age of debauched ideals; and the criticism of Dickens which denied him great power and great deed in fiction would be more dishonest than his worst faking. But in his fiction there is never the open air, never the light of day,

always the air of the theatre, always the light of the lamps. It is not to be supposed that he knew this, or that he wittingly wrought to the effect he produced. But the convention of his fiction was really the man himself; it was the make-believe by which, as an artist, he lived. In its glamour he was learning to the last to do his sort of things better and better, to fasten the theatre more firmly, in tragedy, melodrama, comedy, and broad farce, around the spectator, and to make him share his own illusion that it was life.

I have spoken of "A Tale of Two Cities" and "Great Expectations" before "Little Dorrit," but they followed in order of time that far more characteristic romance, and they were followed by "Our Mutual Friend," in which Dickens was still more himself again. Their heroines were sufficiently unconvincing as to their womanhood, but they were not so entirely, so angelically sexless as Little Dorrit, in the long elaboration of whom Dickens returned in greater force than before to his falsest note. Fortunately, however, Little Dorrit had a selfish sister, vulgar, ungrateful, worldly, but not so very bad, according to her lights; and therefore the novel has a genuine heroine. There is uncommon reason as well as logic in the conception of Fanny Dorrit, and in her Dickens has come near portraying, on a certain low level, a real woman. A ballet-dancer when we first know her, in the days when her father seems destined to die in a debtor's prison, she lives to be a lady of fashion, and wins a high place in the world by those gifts for winning a man with more money than brains which it would be unfit to call arts. In fact, Fanny Dorrit, for all the blame cast upon her, is a very honest creature in her way, with a conscience which she keeps clean after a fashion of her own; and when the rich Mrs. Merdle, whose weak-witted son by her first husband Fanny has captured, makes a cogent appeal to her, she

means to give him up and abide by her bargain. The famous scene of their final interview, in which she makes Little Dorrit participate as the representative of her family, is as characteristic of Dickens's later manner as anything in Dickens's work, and subordinately it is very characteristic of Fanny.

In "Our Mutual Friend" there are again two sister heroines; but as the better of these is never so insufferably good as Dickens's other good girls, Bella Wilfer is a very good heroine. She has a most preposterous part to play, as the ward of the rich Boffin, who pretends to be a wicked miser in order to test her, and find whether she is a selfish worldling or not; and as the beloved of John Rokesmith, who maintains a long disguise, to make sure, as the poor secretary of the pseudo-bad Boffin, that she loves him for himself. But she remains, superior to all this absurdity, a charming, natural girl, not without faults, but humaner on account of them, and sweeter and dearer, at least to the reader. Her relations to her vixenish sister Lavinia, to her majestic shrew of a mother, and to her poor little persecuted cherub of a father, are all most amusingly substantialized, and if her relations to her lover are left somewhat more shadowy, that is because of the utter impossibility of the situation, which denies him anything like true character. She quarrels with Boffin, as he and Rokesmith mean she shall, about his pseudo-bad treatment of Rokesmith, and in leaving the house of her rich protectors, to return home with her father, she engages herself to marry Rokesmith. He comes home with her and her father as far as the gate, where they are delivered over to Mrs. Wilfer, Lavinia, and her young man, George Sampson, and welcomed with a mystified and icy grandeur to the family supper-table by Mrs. Wilfer, who fears that after "Mr. Boffin's board" a "cold neck of mutton and a lettuce" will seem

"SHE ROSE AND SUPPORTED HERSELF ON THE ARM OF HER CHAIR"

meagre fare to Bella. But Bella disperses the mystery, and, heroically backed by her father, tells why she has come home.

"'I hope you are not sorry to see me, ma, dear,' kissing her; 'and I hope you are not sorry to see me, Lavvy,' kissing her too; 'and as I notice the lettuce ma mentioned, on the table, I'll make the salad.' Bella playfully setting herself about the task, Mrs. Wilfer's impressive countenance followed her with glaring eyes, presenting a combination of the once popular sign of the Saracen's Head with a piece of Dutch clock-work. . . . The cherub not presuming to address so tremendous an object, transacted her supper through the agency of a third person, as 'Mutton to your ma, Bella, my dear;' and 'Lavvy, I dare say your ma would take some lettuce if you were to put it on her plate.' Mrs. Wilfer's manner of receiving those viands was marked by petrified absence of mind; in which state, likewise, she partook of them, occasionally laying down her knife and fork, as saying within her own spirit, 'What is this I am doing?' and glaring at one or other of the party, as if in indignant search of information. . . . Miss Lavinia . . . made a dash at her stately parent now, with the greatest impetuosity. 'Ma, pray don't sit staring at me in that intensely aggravating manner! If you see a black on my nose, tell me so; if you don't, leave me alone.' 'Do you address Me in those words?' said Mrs. Wilfer. 'Do you presume?' 'Don't talk about presuming, ma, for goodness' sake. A girl who is old enough to be engaged is quite old enough to object to be stared at as if she was a clock. . . . I am not going to be eyed as if *I* had come from the Boffins', and sit silent under it. I am not going to have George Sampson eyed as if *he* had come from the Boffins', and sit silent under it. If pa thinks proper to be eyed as if *he* had come from the Boffins' also, well and

good. I don't choose to. And I won't!' Lavinia's engineering having made this crooked opening at Bella, Mrs. Wilfer strode into it. 'You rebellious spirit! You mutinous child! Tell me this, Lavinia. If, in violation of your mother's sentiments, you had condescended to allow yourself to be patronized by the Boffins, and if you had come from those halls of slavery—' 'That's mere nonsense, ma,' said Lavinia. 'How!' exclaimed Mrs. Wilfer, with sublime severity. 'Halls of slavery, ma, is mere stuff and nonsense,' returned the unmoved Irrepressible. . . . Bella rose and said, 'Good-night, dear ma. I have had a tiring day, and I'll go to bed.' This broke up the agreeable party. Mrs. Wilfer, washing her hands of the Boffins, went to bed after the manner of Lady Macbeth; and R. W. was left alone among the dilapidations of the supper-table, in a melancholy attitude. But, a light footstep roused him from his meditations, and it was Bella's. Her pretty hair was hanging all about her, and she had tripped down softly, brush in hand, and barefoot, to say good-night to him. 'My dear, you most unquestionably *are* a lovely woman,' said the cherub, taking up a tress in his hand. 'Look here, sir,' said Bella; 'when your lovely woman marries, you shall have that piece if you like, and she'll make you a chain of it. Would you prize that remembrance of the dear creature?' 'Yes, my precious.' 'Then you shall have it if you're good, sir. I am sorry, very sorry, dearest pa, to have brought home all this trouble.' 'My pet,' returned her father, in the simplest good faith, 'don't make yourself uneasy about that. It really is not worth mentioning, because things at home would have taken pretty much the same turn, anyway. If your mother and sister don't find one subject to get at times a little wearing on, they find another. We're never out of a wearing subject, my dear, I assure you. I am afraid you find your

old room with Lavvy dreadfully inconvenient, Bella.' 'No, I don't, pa; I don't mind. Why don't I mind, do you think, pa. . . . Because I am so thankful and so happy!' Here she choked him until her long hair made him sneeze, and then she laughed until she made him laugh, and then she choked him again that they might not be overheard. 'Listen, sir,' said Bella. 'Your lovely woman was told her fortune to-night on her way home. It won't be a large fortune, because if the lovely woman's Intended gets a certain appointment that he hopes to get soon, she will marry on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. But that's at first, and even if it should never be more the lovely woman will make it quite enough. But that's not all, sir. In the fortune there's a certain fair man—a little man, the fortune-teller said—who, it seems, will always find himself near the lovely woman, and will always have kept, expressly for him, such a peaceful corner in the lovely woman's little house as never was. Dear pa, the lovely woman means to look forward to this fortune that has been told for her, so delightfully, and to cause it to make her a much better lovely woman than she ever has been yet. What the little fair man is expected to do, sir, is to look forward to it also, by saying to himself when he is in danger of being over-worried, "I see land at last!"' 'I see land at last!' repeated her father. 'There's a dear Knave of Wilfers!' exclaimed Bella; then, putting out her small, white, bare foot,'That's the mark, sir. Come to the mark. Put your boot against it. We keep to it together, mind! Now, sir, you may kiss the lovely woman before she runs away, so thankful and so happy. Oh, yes, fair little man, so thankful and so happy!'"

It is all of stage quality, but it is very sweet, as to Bella and her father, and very amusing as to Lavinia and her mother. If it were only on the stage as well as

of it, we should cry out over its truth to nature; and as it is, why should we quarrel with it? We understand the conditions on which Dickens was able to work his miracles; and it is accurate to say that what he did was largely and loosely inclusive of life rather than exclusive of it. The impersonation of a quality or a propensity was misrepresentative only as far as it was single. Human nature is never single; it is warm as well as cold; it is light as well as dark; it is noble as well as ignoble; it is good as well as bad; and, in view of this fact, his one-sided types are not characters. But having got this well in mind, we can allow for the truth that is in them, and permit ourselves the pleasure they can give, without treason to a clearer ideal. When, now and then, as in Dora Spenlow, and yet more distinctly in Belle Wilfer, he creates a figure with something like the living woman's moral complexity, we have a glimpse of the great possibilities to which a clearer conception of his art would have enlarged him.

HAWTHORNE'S HESTER PRYNNE

THERE had been among the friendlier prophets overseas a vague expectation that the genuine American fiction, when it came, would be somehow æsthetically responsive to our vast continental spaces and the mighty forces that were taming the forests and prairies, the lakes and rivers, to the use of man. But when it came, the American fiction which owed nothing to English models differed from English fiction in nothing so much as its greater refinement, its subtler beauty, and its delicate perfection of form. While Dickens was writing in England, Hawthorne was writing in America; and for all the ostensible reasons the romances of Hawthorne ought to have been rude, shapeless, provisional, the novels of Dickens ought to have been fastidiously elect in method and material and of the last scrupulosity in literary finish. That is, they ought to have been so, if the obvious inferences from an old civilization ripened in its native air, and the same civilization so newly conditioned under alien skies that it seemed essentially new, were the right inferences. But there were some facts which such hasty conclusions must have ignored: chiefly the fact that the first impulse of a new artistic life is to escape from crude conditions; and subordinately the fact that Hawthorne was writing to and from a sensitiveness of nerve in the English race that it had never known in its English home. We need not deny

the greatness of Dickens in order to feel a patriotic content in the reflection that he represented English fiction in his time, and Hawthorne represented American fiction, as with the same implications Carlyle represented English thought and Emerson American thought.

I

Apart from the racial differences of the two writers, there was the widest possible difference of ideal in Dickens and Hawthorne; the difference between the romanticistic and the romantic, which is almost as great as that between the romantic and the realistic. Romance, as in Hawthorne, seeks the effect of reality in visionary conditions; romanticism, as in Dickens, tries for a visionary effect in actual conditions. These different ideals eventuated with Hawthorne in characters being, doing, and suffering as vitally as any we have known in the world; with Dickens in types, outwardly of our every-day acquaintance, but inwardly moved by a single propensity and existing to justify in some fantastic excess the attribution of their controlling quality. In their mystical world, withdrawn afar from us in the past, or apart from us in anomalous conditions, the characters of Hawthorne speak and act for themselves, and from an authentic individuality compact of good and evil; in times, terms, and places analogous to those in which actual men have their being, the types of Dickens are always speaking for him, in fulfilment of a mechanical conception and a rigid limitation of their function in the drama. They are, in every sense, *parts*, and Hawthorne's creations are *persons*, rounded, whole. This fact appears in what has already been shown of Dickens, and it will appear

concerning Hawthorne from any critical study of his romances.

II

There is, of course, a choice in Hawthorne's romances, and I myself prefer "The Blithedale Romance" and "The Scarlet Letter" to "The Marble Faun" and "The House of the Seven Gables." The last, indeed, I have found as nearly tiresome as I could find anything of Hawthorne's. I do not think it is censuring it unjustly to say that it seems the expansion of a short-story motive to the dimensions of a novel; and the slight narrative in which the concept is nursed with whimsical pathos to the limp end, appears sometimes to falter, and alarms the sympathetic reader at other times with the fear of an absolute lapse. The characters all lack the vitality which the author gives the people of his other books. The notion of the hapless Clifford Pyncheon, who was natured for happiness and beauty, but was fated to such a hard and ugly doom, is perhaps too single for the realization of a complete personality; and poor old Hepzibah, his sister, is of scarcely more sufficient material. They move dim, forlorn wraiths before the fancy, and they bring only such proofs of their reality as ghosts seen by others can supply. The careful elaboration with which they are studied seems only to render them more doubtful, and there is not much in the pretty, fresh-hearted little Phœbe Pyncheon, or her lover Holgrave, with all his generous rebellion against the obsession of the present by the past, to render the central figures convincing. Hawthorne could not help giving form to his work, but as nearly as any work of his could be so "The House of the Seven Gables" is straggling. There is at any rate no great womanly presence to pull it powerfully

together, and hold it in the beautiful unity characteristic of "The Blithedale Romance" and "The Scarlet Letter." What solidarity it has is in the simple Salem circumstance of the story, where the antique Puritanic atmosphere merges with the modern air in a complexion of perennial provinciality.

From the first there is no affectation of shadowy uncertainty in the setting of the great tragedy of "The Scarlet Letter." As nearly as can be, the scenes of the several events are ascertained, and are identified with places in actual Boston. With a like inward sense of strong reality in his material, and perhaps compelled to its expression by that force in the concept, each detail of the drama, in motive, action, and character, is substantiated, so that from first to last it is visible, audible, tangible. From Hester Prynne in her prison—before she goes out to stand with her unlawful child in her arms and the scarlet letter on her breast before the Puritan magistracy and ministry and people, and be charged by the child's own father, as her pastor, to give him up to like ignominy—to Hester Prynne, kneeling over her dying paramour, on the scaffold, and mutely helping him to own his sin before all that terrible little world, there is the same strong truth beating with equal pulse from the core of the central reality, and clothing all its manifestations in the forms of credible, of indisputable personality.

In its kind the romance remains sole, and it is hard to see how it shall ever be surpassed, or even companioned. It is not without faults, without quaint foibles of manner which strike one oddly in the majestic movement of the story; but with the exception of the love-child or sin-child, Pearl, there is no character, important or unimportant, about which you are asked to make believe: they are all there to speak and act for themselves, and they do not need the help of your fancy.

HESTER PRYNNE

They are all of a verity so robust that if one comes to declare Hester chief among them, it is with instant misgivings for the right of her secret paramour, Arthur Dimmesdale, and her secret husband, Roger Chillingworth, to that sorrowful supremacy. A like doubt besets the choice of any one moment of her history as most specific, most signal. Shall it be that dread moment on the pillory, when she faces the crowd with her child in her arms, and her lover adjures her to name its father, while her old husband on the borders of the throng waits and listens?

"The Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale bent his head, in silent prayer, as it seemed, and then came forward. 'Hester Prynne,' said he, leaning over the balcony and looking down steadfastly into her eyes, . . . 'if thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so, than to hide a guilty heart through life. . . . Heaven hath granted thee an open ignominy, that thereby thou mayest work out an open triumph over the evil within thee, and the sorrow without. Take heed how thou deniest to him—who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself—the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips!' The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy. Even the poor baby, at Hester's bosom, was affected by the same influence; for it directed its hitherto vacant

gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms, with a half-pleased, half-plaintive murmur. . . . Hester shook her head. 'Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's mercy!' cried the Rev. Mr. Wilson, more harshly than before. . . . 'Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast.' 'Never!' replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. 'It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!' 'Speak, woman!' said another voice, coldly and sternly, proceeding from the crowd about the scaffold. 'Speak; and give your child a father!' 'I will not speak!' answered Hester, turning pale as death, but responding to this voice, which she too surely recognized. 'And my child must seek a heavenly Father; she shall never know an earthly one!' 'She will not speak!' murmured Mr. Dimmesdale, who, leaning over the balcony, with his hand upon his heart, had awaited the result of his appeal. He now drew back, with a long respiration. 'Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!'"

III

One could hardly read this aloud without some such gasp and catch as must have been in the minister's own breath as he spoke. Yet piercing as the pathos of it is, it wants the ripened richness of anguish, which the passing years of suffering bring to that meeting between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in the forest, when she tells him that his physician and closest companion is her husband, and that Chillingworth's subtlety has divined the minister's relation to

herself and her child. The reader must go to the book itself for a full comprehension of the passage, but no one can fail of its dramatic sense who recalls that Hester has by this time accustomed the little Puritan community to the blazon of her scarlet letter, and in her lonely life of usefulness has conciliated her fellow-townsfolk almost to forgiveness and forgetfulness of her sin. She has gone in and out among them, still unaccompanied, but no longer unfriended, earning her bread with her needle and care of the sick, and Dimmesdale has held aloof from her like the rest, except for their one meeting by midnight, when he stands with her and their child upon the scaffold, and in that ghastly travesty forecasts the union before the people which forms the catastrophe of the tremendous story.

In certain things "The Scarlet Letter," which was the first of Hawthorne's romances, is the modernest and maturest. The remoteness of the time and the strangeness of the Puritan conditions authorize that stateliness of the dialogue which he loved. The characters may imaginably say "methinks" and "peradventure," and the other things dear to the characters of the historical romancer; the narrator himself may use an antiquated or unwonted phrase in which he finds color, and may eschew the short-cuts and informalities of our actual speech, without impeaching himself of literary insincerity. In fact, he may heighten by these means the effect he is seeking; and if he will only keep human nature strongly and truly in mind, as Hawthorne does in "The Scarlet Letter," we shall gratefully allow him a privilege which may or may not be law. Through the veil of the quaint parlance, and under the seventeenth-century costuming, we see the human heart beating there the same as in our own time and in all times, and the antagonistic motives working which have gov-

erned human conduct from the beginning and shall govern it forever, world without end.

Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale are no mere types of open shame and secret remorse. It is never concealed from us that he was a man whose high and pure soul had its strongest contrast in the nature

"Mixt with cunning sparks of hell,"

in which it was tabernacled for earth. It is still less hidden that, without one voluntary lure or wicked art, she was of a look and make to win him with the love that was their undoing. "He was a person of a very striking aspect, with a wide, lofty, and impending brow; large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless he compressed it, was apt to be tremulous. . . . The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which, besides being beautiful from the regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterized by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace which is now recognized as its indication." They were both of their time and place, materially as well as spiritually; their lives were under the law, but their natures had once been outside it, and might be again. The shock of this simple truth can hardly be less for the witness, when, after its slow and subtle evolution, it is unexpectedly flashed upon him, than it must have been for the guilty actors in this drama, when they recognize that, in spite of all their open and secret misery, they are still lovers, and capable of claiming for the very body of their sin a species of justification.

We all know with what rich but noiseless preparation the consummate artist sets the scene of his most consummate effect; and how, when Hester and Pearl have parted with Roger Chillingworth by the shore, and then parted with each other in the forest, the mother to rest in the shadow of the trees, and the child to follow her fancies in play, he invokes the presence of Arthur Dimmesdale, as it were, silently, with a waft of the hand.

"Slowly as the minister walked, he had almost gone by before Hester Prynne could gather voice enough to attract his observation. At length, she succeeded. 'Arthur Dimmesdale!' she said, faintly at first; then louder, but hoarsely, 'Arthur Dimmesdale!' 'Who speaks?' answered the minister. . . . He made a step nigher, and discovered the scarlet letter. 'Hester! Hester Prynne!' said he. 'Is it thou? Art thou in life?' 'Even so!' she answered. 'In such life as has been mine these seven years past! And thou, Arthur Dimmesdale, dost thou yet live?' . . . So strangely did they meet, in the dim wood, that it was like the first encounter, in the world beyond the grave, of two spirits who had been intimately connected in their former life, but now stood coldly shuddering, in mutual dread; as not yet familiar with their state nor wonted to the companionship of disembodied beings. . . . It was with fear, and tremulously, and, as it were, by a slow, reluctant necessity, that Arthur Dimmesdale put forth his hand, chill as death, and touched the chill hand of Hester Prynne. The grasp, cold as it was, took away what was dreariest in the interview. They now felt themselves, at least, inhabitants of the same sphere. Without a word more spoken—neither he nor she assuming the guidance, but with an unexpected consent —they glided back into the shadow of the woods, whence Hester had emerged, and sat down on the heap of moss

where she and Pearl had before been sitting. . . . 'Hester,' said he, 'hast thou found peace?' She smiled drearily, looking down upon her bosom. 'Hast thou?' she asked. 'None!—nothing but despair!' he answered. 'What else could I look for, being what I am, and leading such a life as mine?' . . . 'The people reverence thee,' said Hester. 'And surely thou workest good among them. Doth this bring thee no comfort?' 'More misery, Hester!—only the more misery!' answered the clergyman, with a bitter smile. . . . 'Had I one friend—or were it my worst enemy—to whom, when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself, and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even thus much of truth would save me! But, now, it is all falsehood!—all emptiness! all death!' Hester Prynne looked into his face, but hesitated to speak. Yet, uttering his long-restrained emotions so vehemently as he did, his words here offered her the very point of circumstance in which to interpose what she came to say. She conquered her fears, and spoke. 'Such a friend as thou hast even now wished for,' said she, 'with whom to weep over thy sin, thou hast in me, the partner of it!'—Again she hesitated, but brought out the words with an effort.—'Thou hast long had such an enemy, and dwellest with him, under the same roof!' The minister started to his feet, gasping for breath, and clutching at his heart, as if he would have torn it out of his bosom. 'Ha! What sayest thou!' cried he. 'An enemy! And under my own roof! What mean you?' . . . 'O Arthur,' cried she, 'forgive me! In all things else I have striven to be true! Truth was the one virtue which I might have held fast, and did hold fast, through all extremity; save when thy good—thy life—thy fame—were put in question! Then I consented to a deception. But a

lie is never good, even though death threaten on the other side! Dost thou not see what I would say? That old man!—the physician!—he whom they call Roger Chillingworth!—he was my husband!' The minister looked at her for an instant, with all that violence of passion which—intermixed, in more shapes than one, with his higher, purer, softer qualities—was, in fact, the portion of him which the Devil claimed, and through which he sought to win the rest. Never was there a blacker or a fiercer frown than Hester now encountered. For the brief space that it lasted, it was a dark transfiguration. But his character had been so much enfeebled by suffering, that even its lower energies were incapable of more than a temporary struggle. He sank down on the ground, and buried his face in his hands. . . . 'O Hester Prynne, thou little, little knowest all the horror of this thing! And the shame! —the indelicacy!—the horrible ugliness of this exposure of a sick and guilty heart to the very eye that would gloat over it! Woman, woman, thou art accountable for this! I cannot forgive thee!' 'Thou shalt forgive me!' cried Hester, flinging herself on the fallen leaves beside him. 'Let God punish. Thou shalt forgive!' With sudden and desperate tenderness, she threw her arms around him, and pressed his head against her bosom; little caring though his cheek rested on the scarlet letter. He would have released himself, but strove in vain to do so. Hester would not set him free, lest he should look her sternly in the face. All the world had frowned on her—for seven long years had it frowned upon this lonely woman—and still she bore it all, nor even once turned away her firm, sad eyes. Heaven, likewise, had frowned upon her, and she had not died. But the frown of this pale, weak, sinful, and sorrow-stricken man was what Hester could not bear and live! 'Wilt thou yet forgive me?' she

repeated, over and over again. 'Wilt thou not frown? Wilt thou forgive?' 'I do forgive you, Hester?' replied the minister, at length, with a deep utterance, out of an abyss of sadness, but no anger. 'I freely forgive you now. May God forgive us both! We are not, Hester, the worst sinners in the world. There is one worse than even the polluted priest! That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin! He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart. Thou and I, Hester, never did so!' 'Never, never!' whispered she. 'What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other! Hast thou forgotten it?' 'Hush, Hester!' said Arthur Dimmesdale, rising from the ground. 'No; I have not forgotten!' . . . 'Thou must dwell no longer with this man,' said Hester, slowly and firmly. 'Thy heart must be no longer under his evil eye!' 'It were far worse than death!' replied the minister. 'But how to avoid it? What choice remains to me? Shall I lie down again on these withered leaves, where I cast myself when thou didst tell me what he was? Must I sink down there, and die at once?' 'Alas, what a ruin has befallen thee!' said Hester, with the tears gushing into her eyes. 'Wilt thou die for very weakness? There is no other cause.' 'The judgment of God is on me,' answered the conscience-stricken priest. 'It is too mighty for me to struggle with!' 'Heaven would show mercy,' rejoined Hester, 'hadst thou but the strength to take advantage of it.' 'Be thou strong for me,' answered he. 'Advise me what to do.' 'Is the world, then, so narrow?' exclaimed Hester Prynne, fixing her deep eyes on the minister's, and instinctively exercising a magnetic power over a spirit so shattered and subdued that it could hardly hold itself erect. 'Whither leads yonder forest track? . . . Deeper it goes, and deeper into the wilderness, less plainly to be seen at

every step, until, some few miles hence, the yellow leaves will show no vestige of the white man's tread. . . . Is there not shade enough in all this boundless forest to hide thy heart from the gaze of Roger Chillingworth?' 'Yes, Hester; but only under the fallen leaves,' replied the minister, with a sad smile. 'Then there is the broad pathway of the sea!' continued Hester. 'It brought thee hither. If thou choose, it will bear thee back again.' . . . 'O Hester!' cried Arthur Dimmesdale, in whose eyes a fitful light, kindled by her enthusiasm, flashed up and died away, 'thou tellest of running a race to a man whose knees are tottering beneath him! I must die here! There is not the strength or courage left me to venture into the wide, strange, difficult world, alone!' . . . 'Thou shalt not go alone!' answered she, in a deep whisper. Then, all was spoken."

There is a greatness in this scene which is unmatched, I think, in the book, and, I was almost ready to say, out of it. At any rate, I believe we can find its parallel only in some of the profoundly impassioned pages of the Russian novelists who, casting aside all the common adjuncts of art, reveal us to ourselves in the appeal from their own naked souls. Hawthorne had another ideal than theirs, and a passing love of style, and the meaning of the music of words. For the most part, he makes us aware of himself, of his melancholy grace and sombre power; we feel his presence in every passage, however deeply, however occultly, dramatic; he overshadows us, so that we touch and see through him. But here he is almost out of it; only a few phrases of comment, so fused in feeling with the dialogue that they are like the voice of a chorus, remind us of him.

It is the most exalted instant of the tragedy, it is the final evolution of Hester Prynne's personality. In this scene she dominates by virtue of whatever is womanly and typical in her, and no less by what is personal and

individual. In what follows, she falls like Dimmesdale and Chillingworth under the law of their common doom, and becomes a figure on the board where for once she seemed to direct the game.

In all fiction one could hardly find a character more boldly, more simply, more quietly imagined. She had done that which in the hands of a feeble or falser talent would have been suffered or made to qualify her out of all proportion and keeping with life. But her transgression does not qualify her, as transgression never does unless it becomes habit. She remains exterior and superior to it, a life of other potentialities, which in her narrow sphere she fulfils. What she did has become a question between her and her Maker, who apparently does not deal with it like a Puritan. The obvious lesson of the contrasted fates of Dimmesdale and herself is that to own sin is to disown it, and that it cannot otherwise be expropriated and annulled. Yet, in Hester's strong and obstinate endurance of her punishment there is publicity but not confession; and perhaps there is a lesson of no slighter meaning in the inference that ceasing to do evil is, after all, the most that can be asked of human nature. Even that seems to be a good deal, and in "The Scarlet Letter" it is a stroke of mastery to show that it is not always ours to cease to do evil, but that in extremity we need the help of the mystery "not ourselves, that makes for righteousness," and that we may call Chance or that we may call God, but that does not change in essence or puissance whatever name we give it.

HAWTHORNE'S ZENOBIA AND PRISCILLA, AND MIRIAM AND HILDA

HESTER PRYNNE in "The Scarlet Letter" is studied in the round, with an effect of life which is wanting to heroines in the flat, whatever their charm of color and drawing may be; and Zenobia and Priscilla —especially Zenobia—are still more vitalized by the same method of handling, in "The Blithedale Romance." That romance, as I have elsewhere expressed, is nearer a novel than any other fiction of the author. At times we find ourselves confronted there, in spite of the author, with a very palpitant piece of naturalism. This is not more the fact in the case of the brawny, tobacco-chewing Silas Foster, who instructs the town-bred communists at Blithedale in farming, than in the sumptuous personality of Zenobia, the woman with a mysterious past, who glows upon us in tropical splendor from the first chapters of the romance, and illumines it throughout with the rich ardor of her impassioned presence.

I

Never could a writer have had material more to his mind than Hawthorne found in the conditions at Brook Farm, which he transmuted for his purposes to the imaginary situation at Blithedale, with the restricted scene, sparingly and fitfully contrasted at times with the town life which the visionary reformers, the poets, artists, philanthropists, and mystics, had left behind them in Boston. The small group of characters; the play of interests freed from the sordid alloy of the world;

the psychological and emotional possibilities of an ideal action strongly backgrounded by fact hardly less ideal—these are the materials of a story so slight that one marvels at the treasure of motive and event which it is made to hold. The pages are few in which Hollingsworth, the gloomy friend and potential reformer of criminals, has his being with Zenobia, whose strong heart he breaks, and Priscilla, the pale maiden on whose weakness his misery relies, and Miles Coverdale, the minor poet, and self-conscious historian of a tragedy which he observes with a cynical curiosity rather than a human sympathy. Yet no other book in the whole range of Anglo-Saxon fiction says so much to certain important moods in the reader. There is, of course, some such mechanical toy in "The Blithedale Romance" as is central in every romance, but in this case the toy has a mainspring of reality, a scientific authority, and the story pulsates from it like a living organism. Zenobia and Priscilla are half-sisters; the one, daughter of the father's past opulence and luxury; the other, child of his blighted and ruined present; and in their temperaments they consistently express the qualities of his different fortunes. They express them only too consistently, and with too great constancy to their appointed functions. They are lifelike, but if they were alive they would be more convertible; and in this difference exists the essential and eternal inferiority of the ideal to the real in fiction: the one must keep to its *parti pris;* the other may avail itself of every caprice and vacillation and mutability known to observation and experience, and be only more faithful to nature, its supreme and sole exemplar.

All this is not saying that Hawthorne does not handle his mechanism like the consummate artist he was. There are long times when he makes you or lets you forget it; he never intrudes it; and it is chiefly in the

perfunctory appearances of the father upon the scene that one is aware of Zenobia and Priscilla being operated by it. Priscilla, indeed, is operated throughout, but not by the activity of this principle of heredity so much as by the passions of those about her. She is not so merely a spectator as Coverdale, but she is almost more negative, and her elusive personality is ascertained with exquisite delicacy and a succession of shadowy approaches on the part of the author which enlist the tremulous sympathy of the reader rather than reward it. After all, there does not seem to be very much of Priscilla. Objectively she is a pale, sickly little seamstress, whom Hollingsworth brings to the nascent community at Blithedale by her father's wish, and in unconscious fulfilment of old Fauntleroy's hope that she may there somehow commend herself to the favor of her half-sister Zenobia. Subjectively, she is a capacity for clinging to any strength about her, and attaching it to herself through compassion. With the rude force of a prepotent philanthropist like Hollingsworth this compassion becomes passion, in compliance with the ironical pleasure of nature, while the proud and beautiful Zenobia is offering him her love in vain.

Zenobia is the great personality in the book, and she is substantiated with the conscience of a realist to the material as well as the spiritual vision. "She was dressed," when Coverdale first met her on his arrival at Blithedale, "as simply as possible, in an American print (I think the dry-goods people call it so), but with a silken kerchief, between which and her gown there was one glimpse of a white shoulder. It struck me as a great piece of good fortune that there should be just that glimpse. Her hair, which was dark, glossy, and of singular abundance, was put up rather soberly and primly, without curls, or other ornament, except a single flower. It was an exotic, of rare beauty, and as fresh

as if the hot-house gardener had just clipped it from the stem. That flower has struck deep root into my memory. I can both see it and smell it, at this moment. So brilliant, so rare, so costly, as it must have been, and yet enduring only for a day, it was more indicative of the pride and pomp which had a luxuriant growth in Zenobia's character than if a great diamond had sparkled among her hair. Her hand, though very soft, was larger than most women would like to have, or than they could afford to have, though not a whit too large in proportion with the spacious plan of Zenobia's entire development. It did one good to see a fine intellect (as hers really was, although its natural tendency lay in another direction than toward literature) so fitly cased. She was, indeed, an admirable figure of a woman, just on the hither verge of her richest maturity, with a combination of features which it is safe to call remarkably beautiful, even if some fastidious persons might pronounce them a little deficient in softness and delicacy."

As we see her here Zenobia is always present to the fancy in a warm reality not affected even by that mechanical device of the exotic in her hair, which the author uses to identify her to our consciousness, and insists upon so constantly. But even of this, the great defect in her characterization, I write my censure with a tremor of remorse, for it was precisely this exotic which once seemed to me the most exquisite, the most precious expression of her personality. Now I know that it was merely a survival of an earlier æsthetical faith than that from which Hawthorne wrote "The Blithedale Romance," though doubtless he still believed himself fully living in it.

II

Only the art of Hawthorne could impart a perfect sense of the situation of his story, and as I cannot trans-

ZENOBIA

fer the whole book to my page, I must trust the reader's remembrance of this art for its effect here. Priscilla grows into health and happiness without growing out of character, in the Arcadian air of the Blithedale community; and Zenobia is more and more compassed about by the tragical shadows which the effulgence of her own passion casts, till her despair ends with the defeat of her last vanity in the ugliness of her self-sought death. The history is always without the concealment of the fact that from first to last her fineness was intellectual, and that emotionally, spiritually, she was of a coarse fibre, with even a strain of vulgarity. A certain kind of New England woman, to specialize a little more than to say American woman, has never been so clearly seen or boldly shown as in Zenobia; and in her phase of tragedy she stands as impressively for the nineteenth century as Hester Prynne for the seventeenth in hers. It is with pity almost to heart-break that one witnesses her sacrifice of her belief in the cause of women to Hollingsworth's greedy and relentless philanthropy, and her meek abeyance before his savage proclamation of man's superiority, his brute avowal of contempt for women except as the helpers and comforters of men. When her sacrifice proves vain, and the love which she cannot help betraying to him is without response, we come, in the twilight of the drama, to that great moment where Coverdale meets Hollingsworth and Zenobia and Priscilla together for the last time, in an eddy of the masquerade which has flowed away from them at Blithedale, and left them beside the rock in the forest called Eliot's Pulpit. Both Coverdale and Zenobia have returned from a brief absence in town, where he has seen her with Priscilla, fulfilling a mysterious part of her destiny which relates her to the malign Westervelt.

"Hollingsworth was in his ordinary working-dress. Priscilla wore a pretty and simple gown, with a kerchief

about her neck, and a calash, which she had flung back from her head, leaving it suspended by the strings. But Zenobia (whose part among the maskers, as may be supposed, was no inferior one) appeared in a costume of fanciful magnificence, with her jewelled flower as the central ornament of what resembled a leafy crown, or coronet. . . . Her attitude was free and noble; yet, if a queen's, it was not that of a queen triumphant. . . . 'Hollingsworth—Zenobia—I have just returned to Blithedale,' said I, 'and had no thought of finding you here. We shall meet again at the house. I will retire.' 'This place is free to you,' answered Hollingsworth. 'As free as to ourselves,' added Zenobia. 'This long while past, you have been following up your game, groping for human emotions in the dark corners of the heart. Had you been here a little sooner, you might have seen them dragged into daylight. I could even wish to have my trial over again, with you standing by to see fair play! Do you know, Mr. Coverdale, I have been on trial for my life?' . . . 'You forced this on me,' replied Hollingsworth, looking her sternly in the face. 'Did I call you hither from among the masqueraders yonder? Do I assume to be your judge?' . . . The more I looked at them, and the more I heard, the stronger grew my impression that a crisis had just come and gone. . . . In Zenobia's whole person, beholding her more closely, I saw a riotous agitation; the almost delirious disquietude of a great struggle, at the close of which the vanquished one felt her strength and courage still mighty within her, and longed to renew the contest. . . . 'Ah, do we part so?' exclaimed she, seeing Hollingsworth about to retire. 'And why not?' said he, with almost rude abruptness. 'What is there further to be said between us?' 'Well, perhaps nothing,' answered Zenobia, looking him in the face, and smiling. . . . 'You

have put many queries to me at this, which you design to be our last, interview; and being driven, as I must acknowledge, into a corner, I have responded with reasonable frankness. But, now, with your free consent, I desire the privilege of asking a few questions, in my turn.' 'I have no concealments,' said Hollingsworth. 'We shall see,' answered Zenobia. 'I would first inquire whether you have supposed me to be wealthy?' 'On that point,' observed Hollingsworth, 'I have had the opinion which the world holds.' 'And I held it, likewise,' said Zenobia. 'Had I not, Heaven is my witness, the knowledge should have been as free to you as me. I fancied myself affluent. You are aware, too, of the disposition which I purposed making of the larger portion of my imaginary opulence; nay, were it all, I had not hesitated. Let me ask you, further, did I ever propose or intimate any terms of compact, on which depended this—as the world would consider it—so important sacrifice?' 'You certainly spoke of none,' said Hollingsworth. 'Nor meant any,' she responded. 'I was willing to realize your dream . . . though it should prove the ruin of my fortune. . . . And now, one other question. Do you love this girl?' 'Oh, Zenobia!' exclaimed Priscilla, shrinking back, as if longing for the rock to topple over and hide her. 'Do you love her?' repeated Zenobia. 'Had you asked me that question a short time since,' replied Hollingsworth, after a pause, during which, it seemed to me, even the birch-trees held their whispering breath, 'I should have told you—No!' . . . 'And what is your answer now?' persisted Zenobia. 'I do love her!' said Hollingsworth, uttering the words with a deep inward breath, instead of speaking them outright. 'As well declare it thus as in any other way. I do love her!' 'Now, God be judge between us,' cried Zenobia, breaking into sudden passion, 'which of us two has most mortally

offended him! At least, I am a woman, with every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had—weak, vain, unprincipled (like most of my sex; for our virtues, when we have any, are merely impulsive and intuitive), passionate, too, and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends by indirect and cunning, though absurdly chosen means, as an hereditary bond-slave must; false, moreover, to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me—but still a woman! . . . But how is it with you? Are you a man? No; but a monster! A cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism! Nothing else; nothing but self, self, self! The fiend, I doubt not, has made his choicest mirth of you, these seven years past, and especially in the mad summer which we have spent together. . . . You have embodied yourself in a project. . . . The utmost that can be said in your behalf—and because I would not be wholly despicable in my own eyes, but would fain excuse my wasted feelings, nor own it wholly a delusion, therefore I say it—is, that a great and rich heart has been ruined in your breast. Leave me now. You have done with me, and I with you. Farewell!' 'Priscilla,' said Hollingsworth, 'come.' She rose up, stood shivering like the birch leaves that trembled over her head, and then slowly tottered, rather than walked, toward Zenobia. Arriving at her feet, she sank down there. . . . 'Ah, Priscilla! . . . You kneel to a dethroned princess. You, the victorious one! But he is waiting for you. Say what you wish, and leave me.' 'We are sisters!' gasped Priscilla. . . . It meant the offering of herself, and all she had, to be at Zenobia's disposal. But the latter would not take it thus. 'True, we are sisters!' she replied; and, moved by the sweet word, she stooped down and kissed Priscilla; but not lovingly, for a sense of fatal harm received through her seemed to

be lurking in Zenobia's heart. . . . 'Poor child! Methinks you have but a melancholy lot before you, sitting all alone in that wide, cheerless heart, where, for aught you know—and as I, alas! believe—the fire which you have kindled may soon go out. . . . What will you do, Priscilla, when you find no spark among the ashes?' 'Die!' she answered. 'That was well said!' responded Zenobia, with an approving smile. 'There is all a woman in your little compass, my poor sister. Meanwhile, go with him, and live!' She waved her away, with a queenly gesture, and turned her own face to the rock. I watched Priscilla. . . . Hollingsworth drew her arm within his, and soon disappeared with her among the trees. I cannot imagine how Zenobia knew when they were out of sight; she never glanced again toward them. But, retaining a proud attitude so long as they might have thrown back a retiring look, they were no sooner departed—utterly departed—than she began slowly to sink down. It was as if a great, invisible, irresistible weight were pressing her to the earth. Settling upon her knees, she leaned her forehead against the rock, and sobbed convulsively; dry sobs they seemed to be, such as have nothing to do with tears."

III

In Miriam and Hilda of "The Marble Faun" there are again two heroines in some such proportion as Zenobia and Priscilla are the heroines of "The Blithedale Romance." But Miriam, though of much the same moral frame and material complexion as Zenobia, is not so great and living a figure; while Hilda, perhaps, is rather more vitalized than Priscilla. I cannot think her of a very ample importance. She represents the implacable morality of ignorant purity; and when she has seen the hapless Donatello do the murder to which

Miriam's glance has bidden him, it is essentially impossible for her to have pity on Miriam's despair. Relentlessly and unerringly Hilda fixes the blame on her; she casts Miriam off, but the knowledge of Miriam's guilt obsesses her, and so blackens and burdens her white soul that she cannot get back to the peace by which she lived until, utter Puritan as she is, she has imparted the secret to the confessional.

All this is most truly and delicately felt, most beautifully shown; though, again, the typific white doves of Hilda's tower affect my elderly sense with something of the mechanical superfluity and inadequacy of Zenobia's sumptuous exotic, as an expression of character. Miriam, who is not so novel a conception, has no such adventitious aid in realizing herself to us, and in that degree she is truer. Physically, she is of like make with Hester Prynne, as well as Zenobia, and of a type which represented passion in Hawthorne's imagination; though as to blond women it is by no means clear that "nature made them lighter motions" than the dark complexions, whom he prefers as the exponents of deep and tragic feeling. In any case, however, Miriam is of a tropical beauty, whose splendor is veiled like Zenobia's by the shadows of a past in which she has been sinned against, to the lurid trouble, if not the contamination, of her soul. Perhaps she has even shared in the sinning, but that question is left in the pale limbo where the beginnings and the endings of the story are obscured. What we know is that she is on the scene, with the demon and the destined victim of her past: the mysterious model who persecutes and menaces her, and with that glad earth-nature, Donatello, who grows into spiritual consciousness through the crime he commits in her behalf.

Shall it be owned that once more Miriam recalls Zenobia in that spice of vulgarity which Hawthorne must

HILDA

have meant us to taste in her character? There is something almost coarse in her light way of repulsing the young Italian's love; but this is all atoned for by her devotion to him when their joint crime has united them in one black destiny. The deed is his, but the guilt is hers, as they both instantly recognized; and it is their fatal necessity that they must expiate it, so far as it may be expiated, by a common suffering.

It is in a manner impossible not to choose the instant of the homicide as the supreme scene of the story, and as that in which Miriam leaves the shadow of her suffering to enter the shadow of her sinning; and it is evident that Hawthorne has lavished upon it the richest treasures of his art. It is done so deftly indeed that it would be hard to tell in other words how casually, almost unconsciously, Miriam and Donatello are left alone looking over the brink of the Tarpeian Rock, while the companions of their long ramble through the Roman moonlight have wandered as involuntarily away.

"'It would be a fatal fall, still,' she said to herself, looking over the parapet, and shuddering as her eye measured the depth. . . . Donatello, of whose presence she was possibly not aware, now pressed closer to her side; and he, too, like Miriam, bent over the low parapet and trembled violently. . . . 'What are you thinking of, Donatello?' asked Miriam. 'Who are they,' said he, looking earnestly in her face, 'who have been flung over here in days gone by?' 'Men that cumbered the world,' she replied. 'Men whose lives were the bane of their fellow-creatures. Men who poisoned the air, which is the common breath of all, for their own selfish purposes.' . . . 'Was it well done?' asked the young man. 'It was well done,' answered Miriam; 'innocent persons were saved by the destruction of a guilty one, who deserved his doom.' . . . Looking round, she perceived that all her company of

merry friends had retired, and Hilda, too, in whose soft and quiet presence she had always an indescribable feeling of security. All gone; and only herself and Donatello left hanging over the brow of the ominous precipice. Not so, however; not entirely alone! In the basement wall of the palace, shaded from the moon, there was a deep, empty niche, that had probably once contained a statue; not empty, either; for a figure now came forth from it and approached Miriam. She must have had cause to dread some unspeakable evil from this strange persecutor, and to know that this was the very crisis of her calamity. . . . Miriam seemed dreamily to remember falling on her knees; but, in her whole recollection of that wild moment, she beheld herself as in a dim show, and could not well distinguish what was done and suffered; no, not even whether she were really an actor and sufferer in the scene. Hilda, meanwhile, had separated herself from the sculptor, and turned back to rejoin her friend. At a distance, she still heard the mirth of her late companions, who were going down the cityward descent of the Capitoline Hill. . . . The door of the little court-yard had swung upon its hinges, and partly closed itself. Hilda (whose native gentleness pervaded all her movements) was quietly opening it, when she was startled, midway, by the noise of a struggle within, beginning and ending all in one breathless instant. Along with it, or closely succeeding it, was a loud, fearful cry, which quivered upward through the air, and sank quivering downward to the earth. Then, a silence! The door of the court-yard swung slowly, and closed itself of its own accord. Miriam and Donatello were now alone there. She clasped her hands, and looked wildly at the young man, whose form seemed to have dilated, and whose eyes blazed with the fierce energy that had suddenly inspired him. It had kindled him into a man; it had developed within him an intel-

ligence which was no native characteristic of the Donatello whom we have heretofore known. But that simple and joyous creature was gone forever. 'What have you done?' said Miriam, in a horror-stricken whisper. The glow of rage was still lurid on Donatello's face, and now flashed out again from his eyes. 'I did what ought to be done to a traitor!' he replied. 'I did what your eyes bade me do, when I asked them with mine, as I held the wretch over the precipice!' These last words struck Miriam like a bullet. Could it be so? Had her eyes provoked or assented to this deed? She had not known it. But, alas! looking back into the frenzy and turmoil of the scene just acted, she could not deny—she was not sure whether it might be so or no—that a wild joy had flamed up in her heart, when she beheld her persecutor in his mortal peril. . . . It had blazed up more madly when Donatello flung his victim off the cliff, and more and more while his shriek went quivering downward. With the dead thump upon the stones below had come an unutterable horror. 'And my eyes bade you do it?' repeated she. They both leaned over the parapet, and gazed downward as earnestly as if some inestimable treasure had fallen over and were yet recoverable. On the pavement, below, was a dark mass, lying in a heap, with little or nothing human in its appearance, except that the hands were stretched out, as if they might have clutched, for a moment, at the small, square stones. But there was no motion in them, now. . . . No stir; not a finger moved! 'You have killed him, Donatello! He is quite dead!' said she. . . . She turned to him—the guilty, blood-stained, lonely woman—she turned to her fellow-criminal, the youth, so lately innocent, whom she had drawn into her doom. She pressed him close, close to her bosom, with a clinging embrace that brought their two hearts together, till the horror and agony of each

was combined in one emotion, and that a kind of rapture. 'Yes, Donatello, you speak the truth!' said she; 'my heart consented to what you did. We two slew yonder wretch. The deed knots us together for time and eternity, like the coil of a serpent!' They threw one other glance at the heap of death below, to assure themselves that it was there; so like a dream was the whole thing. Then they turned from that fatal precipice, and came out of the court-yard, arm in arm, heart in heart."

IV

Now that I have obeyed a sort of imperious necessity in selecting the passage given as supremely illustrative, I have my misgiving whether I had not better chosen that scene in the Medici Gardens, where shortly after the murder Miriam and Donatello are together. Their terrible exaltation is past, that "freedom of a broken law" which was briefly theirs has already lapsed into the bondage of remorse; and she realizes that all the love of her blood-stained soul avails nothing to purge his listless spirit of its new-found sense of guilt. This is a great scene; and that again is a great scene where Miriam goes to Hilda in her dove-haunted tower, and the girl's cruel truth accuses and convicts the unhappy woman, and casts her off and disowns her. Did Hawthorne here, I wonder, mean to let us see something ugly in the angelic Hilda's effort for self-protection and her ruthless self-pity for her own involuntary privity to Miriam's guilt? That would be like his subtlety; and it is certain that the effect is to enlist the sympathy of the witness for Miriam, and to render her for the moment less abhorrent than Hilda. In fact, if I must empty the sack altogether, I cannot conceal that at the bottom of it is a dislike for that cold spirit of Hilda and a sense of something selfish in her relation to the whole affair.

Perhaps it is not a real relation. The whole action loses vitality after the parting of Hilda and Miriam; and though it is bravely and beautifully managed to the end, it *is* managed, and does not manage itself. The rest of the story is as intentional, as operated, as the second part of "Faust"; and in this "The Marble Faun" must rank below "The Scarlet Letter" and "The Blithedale Romance," which are of a vitality that carries them strongly to the close. For the same reason Miriam cannot be placed with Hester Prynne and Zenobia, who have no galvanic palingenesis, but live warmly and richly in the memory, while the Miriam of the second volume has to be recalled with a constant effort. It may be said in her defence that the author put upon her a burden to which she was not equal; he was not equal to it himself, as Goethe also was not; and, indeed, no man is. The problem of evil will not be solved.

If we reduce the question which is Hawthorne's greatest heroine to a choice between Hester Prynne and Zenobia, I must give my voice for Zenobia. Few heroines survive so far beyond their story, and remain in a sort so fully a part of experience as she; I know of no other in Anglo-Saxon fiction, and only three or four outside of it. She is not a very great or noble character. She has moments of being rather hard and jealous with Priscilla and rather "nasty" to Coverdale, who doubtless deserves it; but she is largely planned and generously built. She has, as I have owned, a touch of vulgarity, and we are allowed to suspect her of a lawless and sufficiently foolish fancy. She is a half-caste literary talent, and some of her ideals are apparently tawdry; but she is a very woman-soul; what she does and suffers is by the law of her womanhood, which in her death as in her life asserts itself in defeat so cruel as to leave the reader with a lasting pang for her.

THACKERAY'S BAD HEROINES

WITH Hawthorne there was a return, after a whole generation, to a conception of entire womanhood in fiction. His Zenobia and Hester Prynne are really women, and this cannot be unqualifiedly said of Scott's, or Bulwer's, or Dickens's women. At the most it can be said that these novelists caught certain feminine traits and personified them; but femininity never posed for them in the *ensemble*. If, upon a theory I have before advanced, this fact is to judge them and class them as inferior imaginations, in spite of certain prime powers which cannot be denied them, I am unable to intervene in their behalf. I must still believe that novelists are great in proportion to the accuracy and fulness with which they portray women; but what really embarrasses me is that I have claimed this pre-eminence hitherto for the realists only, and Hawthorne can scarcely be counted a realist. He was at least, however, not a romanticist, but a romancer, pure and simple, standing electly aloof from both the antagonistic schools, and breathing a finer ether than our common air in a region as different as poetry from our every-day world.

In this environment he conceived of two women natures, grandly permanent, and of one subordinate woman nature, who resembles these and certain others who resemble one another. They are all alike in menacing withdrawal into the ideal from moment to moment; and the true restorer of the great age of heroinism is a

novelist whose women never threaten thus to abandon the light of open day.

I

Thackeray I take to have been an author whose native bent was towards reality in fiction. But he lived in a literary time when it was all but impossible for one to be directly true; one must somehow bring the truth in circuitously, apologetically, almost shamefacedly. A direct rendering of life was then supposed to be wanting in "imagination," and though Thackeray despised and mocked the false in fiction as much as any man who ever lived, he could not help being a man of his time. He put on a fine literary air of being above his business; he talked of fiction as fable-land, when he ought to have known it and proclaimed it the very home of truth, where alone we can see men through all their disguises; he formed the vicious habit of spoiling the illusion, or clouding the clear air of his art, by the intrusion of his own personality; and in fine he showed himself in spite of his right instincts a survival of the romanticistic period whose traces in others (especially Bulwer and Disraeli) he knew how so deliciously to burlesque.

I shall affront some of those who like Thackeray most (but not most wisely) by saying that he came short of his great possibilities by his willingness to dawdle (and shall I say twaddle?) over his scene when it was strictly his affair to represent it, and by his preference of caricature to character, and sentimentality to sentiment. All the same he was a great talent, and the Ever-Womanly knew his ultimate truth so well that she revealed herself to him as she had not to any other English novelist since Jane Austen's time. It is to be distinguished, though, that she did not fully show her-

self at her best to him. Her best, indeed, she gave him glimpses of, but it was her worst that she fully imparted, trusting him to render it again so that it should not seem so very, very bad, after all.

Thackeray's bad heroines are truer than his good ones. These he was apt to make a little too good; whereas, with that tenderness which the Ever-Womanly expected of him, he let us like his bad ones almost as much. Some people like them even more; and it cannot be denied that Becky Sharp, and Blanche Amory, and Beatrix Esmond are at least more amusing than Amelia Sedley, and Laura Pendennis, and Lady Castlewood; in fact, these virtuous ladies show rather factitious in the baleful light of those wicked ones.

II

I suppose the primacy among Thackeray's women, good, bad, and indifferent, would be awarded to Becky Sharp, by nine-tenths of his critics, and one cannot deny her a high degree of wicked perfection. She had the advantage of coming earliest among his leading heroines, for, though Catharine Hayes preceded Becky Sharp, she was too clearly a satire upon a certain sort of criminal heroines to survive as a personality. But Becky Sharp had just that blend of good and bad which convinces of reality in a creation; she was selfish and cruel, but she had her moments of generosity when she was willing to do a good action which could not disadvantage her, and she was, with all her wickedness, ostensibly kept within those limits of decency dear to Anglo-Saxon fiction which the franker history of Catharine transcends. She ran her course largely in good society, and bad people in good society are somehow more memorable. She has the help of circumstance,

though without adventitious aid Becky Sharp would still be a great figure. She is great almost in spite of her inventor, who had such a boyish delight in having found out a character that he could not forbear nudging the reader, and even shouting his satisfaction into the reader's ear, lest he should fail of some point of the discovery. In the retrospect, however, this want of taste, which was want of art, ceases to affect the result, and any one who knows his "Vanity Fair" sees Becky Sharp as the author imagined her, and as she shows herself in the drama, and does not see Thackeray at all.

The great moments of her history present themselves in successive tableaux, and Becky flinging Miss Pinkerton's parting gift back into the garden as she leaves Miss Pinkerton's school; Becky in her manifold flirtations with Jos. Sedley, and George Osborne, and Rawdon Crawley; Becky making her way into the esteem of Sir Pitt Crawley after her marriage with his brother; Becky's first appearance in high society, cruelly ignored by the women and at last mercifully recognized by her unwilling hostess, the Marchioness of Steyne; Becky surprised by her husband in the Marquis of Steyne's company at her own house; Becky in the shabby hotel at Ostend courted as an "Engel Engländerinn" by those raffish German admirers of hers; Becky doing the good angel when she tells the stupid, constant Amelia that George Osborne had made love to her and asked her to fly with him, and so renders it possible for the widow to renounce her allegiance to the memory of her false husband and marry the faithful Major Dobbin: these are scenes which remain from any reading of the book, and have the property of keeping the mind like facts of one's experience.

In Becky's admirably naughty presence, Beatrix Esmond shows thin and factitious, and Blanche Amory dwindles to the measure of her literary affectations.

Becky Sharp is indeed of that ideal perfection which we find nowhere outside of nature. If Thackeray had done nothing else, she must have immortalized him; and he did a multitude of figures, all so much better than his method of doing them that one hesitates whether to wonder more at means so false or results so true. This greatest creation of his is first of all so tempered that she cannot even illogically arrive at any other end than she reaches, though she sometimes stands at the parting of the ways, and now and then advances a little in the right way. She is destined to make others her prey, not because she is stronger, but because she is weaker; she might be willing to be good if she thought goodness would avail; and she is at her worst because certain things are left out of her rather than because she has done certain things. She has defects of nature: she is incapable either of passion or affection; she loves neither her husband nor her son; and these defects are imputed to her for evil, but they hardly constitute guilt. Her guilt is in telling and acting lies; but she tells them and acts them because she is weak and has no other means of offence or defence that seem to her so effectual. She is not incapable of gratitude, and when she can with safety do others a good turn she sometimes does it; she would probably always do it rather than an ill turn. Thackeray's hand is heavy throughout "Vanity Fair," which is 'prentice work compared with "Pendennis" and "The Newcomes"; and he exults in Becky's decline and fall, as perhaps he might not in a maturer work. He is boisterously sarcastic at her expense, as if she were responsible for the defects of her nature, and must be punished for her sins as well as by them. His morality regarding her is the old conventional morality which we are now a little ashamed of, but in his time and place he could scarcely have any other; after all, he was a simple soul, and strictly

of his epoch. A later and subtler time must do finer justice to a woman badly born, and reared in dependence and repression; liberated from school to a world where she must fight her own way; taught the evil consciousness of the fascination which she had but which she never felt for men; married to a reprobate aristocrat not her superior in nature, and distinctly her inferior in mind; tempted by ambition and spurred by necessity the greater since she had her husband as well as herself to care for, she was predestined to the course she ran; and she could not have run any other, made as she was, so clever, so pretty, so graceful, so unprincipled.

III

It is difficult to know what may be the lesson of a character so evilly conditioned that its evil was inevitable, but possibly it may be to move the spectator less to "justice" than to mercy. To this effect Becky Sharp seems to come in spite of her creator, whom we may safely leave to his mistaken severities with her, while we rejoice in the æsthetic side of his performance, so altogether better than the ethical. His art is quite unerring in result, though it is mostly, as I think, so bad in process. There are a hundred proofs of Thackeray's greatness in the story; whenever he deals with Rebecca Sharp he is great, but at which moment he is greatest I could not well say. The obvious climax, of course, comes when Becky, having made her way into society under the patronage of Lord Steyne, and preyed upon his purse to the common advantage of her husband and herself, has her husband—still in their joint interest—shut up for debt. While she is receiving Lord Steyne at her own house, Rawdon Crawley, getting out of prison, unexpectedly comes home.

"He took out his door-key and let himself into his house. He could hear laughter in the upper rooms. He was in the ball-dress in which he had been captured the night before. He went silently up the stairs, leaning against the banisters at the stair head. . . . Becky was singing a snatch of the song of the night before; a hoarse voice shouted 'Brava! Brava!'—it was Lord Steyne. Rawdon opened the door and went in. A little table with a dinner was laid out—and wine and plate. Steyne was hanging over the sofa on which Becky sat. The wretched woman was in a brilliant full toilette, her arms and all her fingers sparkling with bracelets and rings; and the brilliants on her breast that Steyne had given her. He had her hand in his and was bowing over it to kiss it, when Becky started up with a faint scream as she caught sight of Rawdon's white face. . . . There was that in Rawdon's face which caused Becky to fling herself before him. 'I am innocent, Rawdon,' she said, 'before God I am innocent!' She clung hold of his coat, of his hands; her own were all covered with serpents, and rings, and baubles. 'I am innocent. Say I am innocent,' she said to Lord Steyne. He thought a trap had been laid for him, and was as furious with the wife as with the husband. 'You innocent! Damn you,' he screamed out. 'You innocent! . . . You're as innocent as your mother the ballet dancer and your husband the bully. Make way, sir, and let me pass;' and Lord Steyne seized up his hat, and with flame in his eyes, and looking his enemy fiercely in the face, marched upon him. . . . But Rawdon Crawley, springing out, seized him by the neckcloth until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed and bent under his arm. 'You lie, you dog!' said Rawdon. 'You lie, you coward and villain.' And he struck the peer twice over the face with his open hand, and flung him bleeding to the ground. It was

"BECKY STARTED UP WITH A FAINT SCREAM"

all done before Rebecca could interpose. She stood there trembling before him. She admired her husband, strong, brave, victorious. 'Come here!' he said. She came up at once. 'Take off those things.' She began, trembling, pulling the jewels from her arms, and the rings from her shaking fingers, and held them up, all in a heap, looking at him. 'Throw them down,' he said, and she dropped them. He tore the diamond ornament out of her breast, and flung it at Lord Steyne. It cut him on his bald forehead. 'Come up stairs,' Rawdon said to his wife. 'Don't kill me, Rawdon,' she said. He laughed savagely. 'I want to see if that man lies about the money as he has about me. Has he given you any?' 'No,' said Rebecca. 'That is—' 'Give me your keys,' Rawdon answered, and they went out together. Rawdon flung open boxes and wardrobes, throwing the multifarious trumpery of their contents here and there, and at last he found the desk. It . . . contained a pocket-book with bank-notes, . . . and one was quite a fresh one—a note for a thousand pounds which Lord Steyne had given her. 'Did he give you this?' Rawdon said. 'Yes,' Rebecca answered. 'I'll send it to him to-day,' . . . and he left her without another word."

Left her; and the reader is left with the impression that this blackguard, who had as literally lived upon his wife as if all that Lord Steyne said were true, is somehow better than she. But he is not; and in this case as in most others of the kind the injured husband, who poses so finely as the defender of marriage and the avenger of his own honor, has had more agency in his own ignominy than the world will ever own. It is a false and wrong touch in the scene, but still it is a very great scene, and managed very quietly, very intensely. It implicates pretty nearly all there is of poor Becky, past, present, and future, without any apparent inter-

ference of the author's. For once, he is not on the stage, and he does not even come in with an epilogue, at least for the time being. He could not often hold his hand; when he painted a saint, he wanted to paint "Saint" all over the halo; and when he did a devil, he thought it well to tag his forked tail with a label proclaiming his demoniacal quality. But in this great instance, he trusts the meaning of Becky Sharp to the spectator's intelligence, with scarcely the waste of a word.

IV

There are half a dozen passages in Becky's history almost as good, but not one in the history of Beatrix Esmond which approaches this in power. To be sure she is never directly seen, but always through the eyes of that intolerable prig Henry Esmond, which are fixed mainly upon his own perfections. Even if she had been directly seen, however, I doubt if there would have been much real drama in her, though plenty of theatre. Several *coups de théâtre* there are in her career, and chiefly that when Esmond and her brother find her at Castlewood with the young Pretender, and prevent her for the time from giving her worthlessness to his worthlessness. If one reads the story in cold blood it is hard to believe in it at all, it is at every moment so palpably and visibly fabricated; and perhaps Beatrix is no more a doll than those other eighteenth-century marionettes; but compared with Becky Sharp a doll she certainly is. It is only in her avatar of Madame Bernstein, in "The Virginians," that she begins to persuade you she is at best anything more than a nineteenth-century actress made up for her part. She suffers, of course, from the self-parade of Esmond, and has not, poor girl, half a chance to show herself for what she is. Her honest,

selfish worldliness is, however, more interesting than her mother's much-manipulated virtues; but it is to be remembered in behalf of Lady Castlewood that Beatrix has at no turn of her career such a false part to play as that of a woman who falls in love with a boy, and then promotes his passion for her daughter, and at last takes him herself when her daughter will not. Indeed, I do not know why she should be so much blamed for her heartlessness; people cannot go and have heart unless nature has provided them the means; and, after all, the heartlessness of Beatrix is shown chiefly in her not loving Mr. Esmond, who is not an unprejudiced witness. The solemn scolding he gives her when he breaks the Duke of Hamilton's death to her seems to me quite preposterous; but then he is at all times preposterous. When he interferes in her intrigue with the Stuart whom he is helping put on the English throne, it is no wonder she hates him: mischief for mischief, hers is far the less. Esmond, it will be remembered, scolds the prince in much the same temper that he has scolded Beatrix, for running down into the country after her, when he ought to have been waiting Queen Anne's death in London. He burns up the patent of Marquis which the Stuarts had given his father, and once more renounces his right to the title of Castlewood—he does it half a dozen times in all—and then the prince gives him and Lord Castlewood the satisfaction of a gentleman for his pursuit of their sister and cousin, by crossing swords with them.

"The talk was scarce over when Beatrix entered the room. What came she there to seek? She started and turned pale at the sight of her brother and kinsman. . . . 'Charming Beatrix,' said the prince with a blush that became him very well, 'these lords have come a-horseback from London, where my sister lies in a despaired state, and where her successor makes

himself desired. . . . Mademoiselle, may we take your coach for town?' 'Will it please the king to breakfast before he goes?' was all Beatrix could say. The roses had shuddered out of her cheeks; her eyes were glaring; she looked quite old. She came up to Esmond, and hissed out a word or two. 'If I did not love you before, cousin,' says she, 'think how I love you now.' If words could stab, no doubt she would have killed Esmond. She looked at him as if she could. But her keen words gave no wound to Mr. Esmond; his heart was hard. And as he looked at her he wondered that he could ever have loved her."

This, I will confess, seems to me great rubbish, of the true historical-romance sort, the mouthing and the posing and all; and of the whole group it is Beatrix alone who seems natural. But doubtless one ought not to praise her, and I will allow that she is preferable only to the good people of the story.

V

I am rather glad, however, to get away from her to Blanche Amory, who is a flirt of as modern make as poor Becky Sharp herself, but of lighter weight, and a lamb that is whity-brown where Becky is blackest. Of course, by modern, I mean modern of the second quarter, not the fourth quarter, of our century; of the time when young ladies of fashion wished to be thought literary, as now they wish to be thought athletic, and a little while ago wished to be thought artistic. Blanche Amory, whose first name was really Betsy, wrote verses in both English and French; she sang and played and drew and danced divinely, and she looked the part. "She had fair hair, with green reflections in it; but she had dark eyebrows. She had long, black eyelashes

"'COUSIN, THINK HOW I LOVE YOU NOW'"

which veiled beautiful brown eyes. She had such a slim waist that it was a wonder to behold; and such slim little feet that you would have thought the grass would scarcely bend under them. . . . She was always smiling, and a smile not only showed her teeth wonderfully, but likewise exhibited two lovely little pink dimples, that nestled in either cheek."

Of course, a young lady so equipped by nature and art to take the hearts of men boxed her brother's ears in private, and mocked herself of her fat, old, good-natured mother, and made all the trouble she could for her reprobate step-father. Her real father is even more reprobate, being an ex-convict and homicide who lives upon his wife's second husband, by the threat of turning up and claiming his own. When he finally does so, his daughter has run through her two great flirtations with Pendennis and Harry Foker, and is in a position to be married to a *soi-disant* French nobleman, and to shine as a *salonière* in the Paris of the Citizen King. She is a cat and a minx, but not so much of either that the spectator cannot enjoy her gambols; and it may be said in her behalf that she is no worse behaved, however badly natured, than Pendennis. A case might be made out for her, but not by her. The trouble is not so much that she is malevolent as that she is mendacious, but still she is mischievous, and likes to stick pins into people, for the pleasure of seeing them wince.

The worst of it all is that Thackeray cannot let her alone. He must keep satirizing her, and making a parade of her pretty wickedness, instead of allowing it to show itself in what the poor thing does and says; he must wink at the reader, and whisper him the open secret of her affectation and malice. She is by no means a lady-villain such as some lady-novelists acquainted us with later; it is doubtful whether she is very black-hearted, or would have done any very dark deed. She

wishes to be amused, and she wishes to be married; to make a figure in the great world where so many love to shine. She is really very clever, and, as we have seen, very pretty. With half the expenditure of force, she might be much more effective, even in the direction of her ambition, if she would be a little honester; but that is not in the flirt-nature, which in her Thackeray recognized first in all the importance it has kept since in fiction.

THACKERAY'S GOOD HEROINES

IT will have been noted by the attentive reader that the bad heroines of Thackeray had all some virtue, which if not quite a saving virtue was still such as to move them to good actions at times, and to keep them from being wholly reprobate. Blanche Amory, who was less direly wicked than either Becky Sharp or Beatrix Esmond, had rather less of this virtue than they, and being vain where they were ambitious, was less moved to occasional kindness. In this she was truly divined, and in her Thackeray marked a great advance in the study of the bad heroine, quite as great as that he made in the study of the good heroine when he learned that she was never altogether good, but was sometimes cruel and jealous and even mean, and was very apt to be capricious. He was once considered a terrible cynic, and I think this notion of him, which now seems so droll, must have come from women unwisely dissatisfied that he did not find the best of their sex altogether angelic. At any rate, he was the discoverer (so far as any man may be the discoverer of anything) of the fallibility of angels; but he had not the courage of his facts, quite, and when he had allowed the defects of their qualities to be seen he felt bound to color these qualities to a yet more heavenly hue, and so was in danger of undoing all the good of his discovery.

I

I have already supposed that when Thackeray's good heroines are mentioned, Lady Castlewood, Helen

Pendennis, and Laura Bell would come first to mind. It has been pretty well agreed that Amelia Sedley, sweet, and kind, and true as she is, cannot be counted with the others because she is too passive, too insipid; and yet I think a good word might be said for her. Nine-tenths of the kindly people in the world are no more positive than she; goodness, in fact, is not a very positive thing, or not nearly so positive as evil; and in the things that lie next to active goodness, as patience, quiet courage, devotion to an ideal, Amelia is very well. Her devotion does not avail her with the lovers of lovers because it is for an unworthy ideal, and it is counter to the devotion of another who is of the highest desert. But the fact that George Osborne was shallow and false does not impeach the wisdom of the woman whom he deceived and who remains constant to his memory so many years; and the fact that Major Dobbin so pre-eminently merits her love is no just censure of her refusal.

It is a disadvantage of Thackeray's method that his conception of a situation does not reach his reader clear and simple; it is so darkened with advice about it, that the reader is not able to judge it without prejudice. He must free his mind of all sorts of suggestion from the author before he can fairly judge it; but if he once does this in the case of Amelia Sedley I think he will find her neither so weak nor so silly as he must from the impression given him, as it were, at second hand. The situation left to take its chance with the reader is of a delicate pathos, and not of that serio-comic cast which it otherwise wears.

This is something like saying that Thackeray imagined his things better than he represented them; and I am afraid that this is what I mean. I think that sometimes he changed his mind about them, and "fought" them, as the actors say, to a conclusion different from

that which he originally had in view. This appears to me particularly true of the situation in "Henry Esmond," where (without knowing the "inside facts") I believe that when he first imagined Esmond in love with Beatrix, he meant him to be either fortunate or unfortunate in his love of her with no ulterior view for him. His love for Lady Castlewood and hers for him affects me as an afterthought; and though Thackeray achieved a novelty by it, he did not create beauty, as one always does when one follows the line of probability. It is, of course, *possible* that a man may fall in love with a woman ten years his senior, after he has been in love with her daughter; and of course such a woman *may* have cherished a passion for him, at first unconscious, and always silent, and, having promoted his love for her daughter by every means in her power, may end by marrying him herself. I say the thing is possible; but it is so ugly, so out of nature, that it is not less than revolting; and therefore I cannot believe that the case was first imagined so.

Having finally imagined it so, Lady Castlewood's creator begins well back in her duplex personality to prepare the reader for the unhandsome dénouement. The story is told by Esmond, and very early in it he dwells upon the beauty of his "sweet mistress," his "dear mistress," and more and more repeats his sense of it, with an increasing emphasis upon the surprising youthfulness which survives in the mother of a married son and grown-up daughter. Apart from this perfunctory admiration of her charms, however, Esmond shows her a most interesting and noble character, with those limitations which best realize her virtues. It is altogether in character that a beautiful and serious girl should fall in love with a dashing young nobleman like Castlewood; that she should be devoted to him, and then with just cause resentfully jealous; that she

should turn in her despair of him to the friendless little Esmond who has come to live with them, and should spend her wounded and outraged love in motherly tenderness upon him; that she should rely increasingly upon his truth and courage, and love him as an eldest son; that later, when he has become a man, and has been wounded in her husband's fatal quarrel, she should come to him, sick and in prison, to upbraid him for her loss. It is a great scene, where she does so, and much admired, though I doubt if it is always admired for what is finest in the subjective drama, namely, her wish to punish herself in him for the fact that she had really ceased to love her husband. She does not really suspect Esmond of failing Castlewood or abetting him in his quarrel; but somehow she must take out her remorse, and woman-like she takes it out of the creature she loves best.

Sometime she must begin to be conscious that she no longer loves Esmond quite as a mother; of a young girl it could be supposed that she might continue ignorant of the nature of her feeling, but Lady Castlewood is a mature woman, with all the experience of a wife. The false note is first sounded when in this necessary consciousness she tries to promote his passion for her daughter, which would be impossible. I know that all sorts of idiotic and detestable self-sacrifice is preached in fiction, but this is a little too repulsive for belief. The imagination of the reader refuses to join with that of the author, who is left henceforth to manage the affair alone; and no greater proofs of his power could be shown than he gives in certain ensuing passages of the story. To humor the conceit, we may suppose that Lady Castlewood is doing penance for her own passion in favoring Esmond with Beatrix, but in such a scene as that with the Duke of Hamilton just before his intended marriage with her daughter, she rises into a nobler

function than any mere suffering, and shows herself at her loveliest and best.

Beatrix had just put on a diamond necklace which Esmond had given her for a wedding-gift when the Duke was announced. "He looked very black at Mr. Esmond, to whom he made a very low bow, indeed, and kissed the hand of each lady in his most ceremonious manner. 'Look, my Lord Duke,' says Mistress Beatrix, advancing to him and showing the diamonds on her breast. 'Diamonds,' says his Grace. 'H'm! They seem pretty.' . . . 'They are a present on my marriage,' says Beatrix. 'From her Majesty?' asks the Duke. 'From our cousin, Colonel Henry Esmond,' says Beatrix, taking the colonel's hand very bravely, 'who was left guardian to us by our father, and who has a hundred times shown his love and friendship for our family.' 'The Duchess of Hamilton receives no diamonds but from her husband, madam,' says the Duke. 'May I pray you to restore these to Mr. Esmond?' 'Beatrix Esmond may receive a present from our kinsman and benefactor, my Lord Duke,' says Lady Castlewood, with an air of great dignity. . . . 'Kinsman and benefactor,' says the Duke. 'I know of no kinsman: and I do not choose that my wife should have for a benefactor a—' 'My lord!' says Colonel Esmond. 'I am not here to bandy words,' says his Grace: 'frankly I tell you that your visits to this house are too frequent, and that I choose no presents for the Duchess of Hamilton from gentlemen that bear a name they have no right to.' 'My lord!' breaks out Lady Castlewood, 'Mr. Esmond hath the best right to that name of any man in the world: and 'tis as old and honorable as your Grace's.' My Lord Duke smiled and looked as if Lady Castlewood was mad, that was so talking to him. 'If I called him benefactor,' said my mistress, 'it is because he has been so to us—the noblest,

the truest, the bravest, the dearest of benefactors. He would have saved my husband's life from Mohun's sword. He did save my boy's, and defend him from that villain. . . . The title we bear is his if he would claim it. 'Tis we who have no right to our name: not he, that's too great for it. . . . His father was Viscount of Castlewood, and Marquis of Esmond before him, and he is his father's lawful son and true heir, and . . . if he is content to forego his name that my child may bear it, we love and honor him and bless him under whatever name he bears'—and here the fond and affectionate creature would have knelt to Esmond, but that he prevented her; and Beatrix, running up to her with a pale face and a cry of alarm, embraced her and said, 'Mother, what is this?' ''Tis a family secret, my Lord Duke,' says Esmond: 'poor Beatrix knew nothing of it, nor did my lady till a year ago.' . . . And then in her touching way, and having hold of her daughter's hand, and speaking to her rather than my Lord Duke, Lady Castlewood told the story which you already know, lauding up to the skies her kinsman's behavior. On his side Mr. Esmond explained the reasons that seemed sufficiently cogent with him why . . . he should remain as he was, Colonel Esmond. 'And Marquis of Esmond, my lord,' says his Grace, with a low bow. 'Permit me to ask your lordship's pardon for words that were uttered in ignorance, and to beg for the favor of your friendship. . . . I shall esteem it a favor, my lord, if Colonel Esmond will give away the bride.' 'And if he will take the usual payment in advance, he is welcome,' says Beatrix, stepping up to him; and as Esmond kissed her she whispered, 'Oh, why didn't I know you before?'"

Lady Castlewood, in fine, seems to me a beautiful creation of which too much is asked. If she could have been left quietly a widow, and Esmond been allowed, or

"'THE DUCHESS OF HAMILTON RECEIVES NO DIAMONDS EXCEPT FROM HER HUSBAND'"

required to console himself for Beatrix with some other, or no other, if need be, she would have remained one of the most perfect figures in fiction. But as it is her loveliness is blotted, her perfection is marred, by the part so improbably attributed to her. Women marry a second time, and they are not unapt to marry men younger than themselves in such cases, but Lady Castlewood is apparently the only woman who brought up a boy as her son, and after she had witnessed his unrequited love for her daughter, whom she tries to have marry him, marries him herself. It does not seem either nice or true; if it were true, that would go a great way towards consoling one for its not being nice.

II

Thackeray cannot be called the inventor of the superstition that people who are crossed in love when young keep their thwarted passion tenderly and sacred in mind during a long married life with partners they have never loved; but he preached it much and often. He preached it in the case of Mrs. Pendennis, who is supposed to live in respect and awe for the man she married while keeping green the memory of her lost love in her heart. This may be possible, but it does not seem probable, and it is not to my mind pathetic, but merely sentimental. It does not indeed take so much from Helen Pendennis as the abnormal passion attributed to Lady Castlewood takes from her, but it adds nothing to our sense of her loveliness; and the probability of the situation is not heightened by her having her dead lover's little daughter (by the second marriage he had made) come to live with her as her own child. That must render it even a little more difficult for her unloved but honored husband. It is supposed to happen, however, and the little girl who is brought up with Arthur Pendennis like

a sister is Laura Bell, the heroine jointly with Blanche Amory of the novel named "Pendennis" after him, and the heroine who finally marries him.

She does so after much misgiving, and after foregoing the love of a nobler man; yet her affection for Pendennis has borne the test not only of familiar association with him from childhood, but also of much wandering and vacillation on his part. He is generally pronounced altogether unworthy of her, but women have a way of knowing who is worthy of them that may be generally trusted, and Laura Bell is not illogically willing to take Arthur Pendennis in the end. She is a girl of character, which is to say of sense, and the book in which she figures so greatly to her credit is the effect of a constant good sense such as has rarely found expression in fiction. It is a work of far greater mastery than "Vanity Fair," and paints the great world with which Thackeray loved to deal with a touch altogether lighter and finer. Its charm is that presence of youth which warms and illumines it: youth sometimes spoiled and sometimes unspoiled, but still youth with its wide horizons and far perspectives. For the purpose of these inadequate studies I have been going through all Thackeray's great novels (once so familiar to me) again, and "Pendennis," without any such supreme figure as Becky Sharp, seems to me still his supreme effort, especially in respect to its women, the ultimate test of greatness in a novel. Helen Pendennis, Laura Bell, Blanche Amory, Lady Clavering, Fanny Bolton, Miss Fotheringay form a group of extraordinary interest and variety, and the first of them are the first named.

III

Helen Pendennis I have called a sentimentalist, and so she is, but she is not wholly a sentimentalist; only

a man can be that. She wants to spoil her boy, but she knows what is good for him, and she wishes him to marry Laura. She is tolerant of the girl's contempt for his airs and egotisms; she even borrows her money to pay his debts and give him a start in life; but she finds it hard to forgive her for refusing him. Still she does forgive her, and lives on with her in tender affection and a hope which she loses only when she believes her son guilty of betraying poor little Fanny Bolton, and when she has no thought but of his righting the supposed wrong by marrying the girl.

This is altogether fine, and one of the best parts of the book is that relating to Pendennis's sickness, where she and Laura come up to London, and in the delusion of a superior virtue spurn poor Fanny from his bedside. The whole episode, down to the son's quarrel with his mother for her mistaken condemnation of Fanny, is most admirable, but out of it all I believe I prefer that exalted moment when Helen and Laura arrive upon the scene.

"As Fanny saw the two ladies and the anxious countenance of the elder, who regarded her with a look of inscrutable alarm and terror, the poor girl knew at once that Pen's mother was before her. . . . Fanny looked wistfully at Mrs. Pendennis and afterwards at Laura; there was no more expression in the latter's face than if it had been a mass of stone. Hard-heartedness and gloom dwelt in the figures of both of the newcomers; neither showed any the faintest gleam of mercy or sympathy for Fanny. She looked desperately from them to the Major behind them. Old Pendennis dropped his eyelids, looking up ever so stealthily from under them at Arthur's poor little nurse. 'I—I wrote to you yesterday, if you please, ma'am,' Fanny said, trembling in every limb as she spoke; and as pale as Laura, whose sad, menacing face looked over Mrs. Pendennis's shoul-

der. 'Did you, madam?' Mrs. Pendennis said. 'I suppose I may now relieve you from nursing my son. I am his mother, you understand.' 'Yes, ma'am. I—this is the way to his—oh, wait a minute,' cried out Fanny. 'I must prepare you for his—' The widow, whose face had been hopelessly cruel and ruthless, started back with a little gasp and cry, which she speedily stifled. 'He's been so since yesterday,' Fanny said, trembling very much and with chattering teeth. A horrid shriek of laughter came out of Pen's room, . . . and after several shouts the poor wretch began to sing a college drinking-song. . . . He was quite delirious. 'He does not know me, ma'am,' said Fanny. 'Indeed! Perhaps he will know his mother; let me pass, if you please, and go in to him,' and the widow hastily pushed by little Fanny, and through the dark passage into Pen's sitting-room. Laura sailed by Fanny, too, without a word; and Major Pendennis followed them. Fanny sat down on a bench in the passage and cried."

The story seldom rises into so much of pure drama as this; Thackeray seems rather ashamed of drama, and shrugs it away when he can, or spoils it by too much chorussing; but here we have it almost pure, at least for an instant, and it makes us wish we had it oftener from him.

Of subjective drama there is a constant abundance, and that of Laura's high and wise soul is always good and genuine, through the whole progress of her love for Pendennis, with its phases and changes, and its total eclipse at one time by her passion for Warrington. She has no other; she owns to Pendennis that she has had this, and that if it had not been for Warrington's fatal entanglement she would gladly have married him. Out of what she knows of Pendennis she knows comparatively little that is good, and yet somehow she

"LAURA SAILED BY FANNY, TOO, WITHOUT A WORD"

divines his essential goodness, and confides her future to it.

Laura is, in fact, a most generous as well as most sensible creature. Her relation to money is that of the highest-minded woman; she does not want to waste it, but she will give it without a care, though not without a thought, for herself. Her relation to Helen Pendennis is wholly beautiful, and without idealizing that over-idealizing lady she is utterly devoted to her. She makes her tacit criticisms of her, but they make no difference in her conduct towards her adoptive mother.

She has a girl's fondness for the pleasures of the world, but she gets only good from it. Even from such a hardened worldling as Blanche Amory she gets only good, both in her illusion and her disillusion concerning her. Towards Pendennis in his long, insincere flirtation with Blanche she has a cool contempt which fires into a single instant of jealousy. Her cruelty to Fanny Bolton is of ignorant purity; it is almost a necessary evil.

IV

To have imagined a creature so just and fine and real is a high effect both of mind and heart in Thackeray, who has a right to be judged as much by Laura Bell as by Becky Sharp; by Ethel Newcome as by Blanche Amory. Between those two "good" heroines of his, I should be puzzled which to choose as the better, or, more importantly, as the truer study in girlhood. They have both great qualities, and I am not going to decide for Ethel Newcome because she has more the defects of her qualities, and figures on a larger stage, though I like to have the limitations of virtue shown, and incline to believe that those are the best portraits in which I find not only the realization of beauty, but the sug-

gestion of what is unlovely. After all, unless a girl comes outright to folly or evil, even her potentialities of wrong have their charm, and Ethel Newcome is the more interesting because at a certain time she is ready to reverse the old saw and count love well lost for the world. She does not finally change her mind so much as have it changed for her by events and circumstances; and in this she, even more than Laura Bell, is like girls in life, and justifies herself as a work of the author's highest art.

THACKERAY'S ETHEL NEWCOME AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S JANE EYRE

THERE are so many of Thackeray's women that to choose any eight or ten of them must seem like ignoring as many others equally worthy of study. The reader may demand in fit dudgeon why this one or that one, whom he has always thought a significant figure, is left out; and against such censure it is not easy to provide. All one can say is that by universal consent such and such women have been chosen the novelist's great heroines, and that these must represent him, even if injustice seems done to others. In "The Newcomes," for instance, there are half a score of women who will come to mind at the mention of the novel: Lady Kew and her daughter Lady Anne Newcome, Mrs. Mackenzie and her daughter Rosie, Miss Honeyman, Madame de Florac, Mrs. Pendennis, Mrs. Hobson Newcome, Lady Clara Pulleyn; these all have claims, nicely differenced and distinguished, and yet it is Ethel Newcome who remains first, and has the largest share of our interest if not our sympathy.

I

It seems to me that in Ethel Newcome the author has done his utmost to imagine a character of noble but not unnatural beauty. He has fancied her of a station of life in which her qualities could best show themselves,

with the light of the great world upon them. He has not pretended that she was at once perfect, or ever perfect, but he has wished her to appear capable of learning from her own faults, and from the errors and miseries of others. He is admirably successful in making us feel her growth: she really grows in our knowledge from a young, unformed girl, to a mature woman, who has come to the knowledge of right and wrong by the use of her own sense, and has finally chosen the right through a love of it. Her youthful love-making with Clive Newcome is pretty and winning, though she gives him up at the bidding of the world in the terrible old Lady Kew, her grandmother, and for a while she thinks she cares more for rank and splendor than for love. She might not so unjustly have them with Clive married; but it is of her own motion, from the instruction of the unhappiness she has seen so near her in her brother's marriage, that she breaks with the Marquis of Farintosh whom she does not love, and prefers a life of such usefulness as she can lead in her family, with her kind, dull, capricious mother and her younger brothers and sisters. She is never an insipid saint; and she fights evil in her wicked brother, as well as eschews it, chiefly employing the powers of sarcasm with which she is gifted. She is rather satirical with most people and is not afraid to measure wits even with her grandmother, who has a very trenchant wit, and wields it so mercilessly that all the rest of her family are in terror of her. In short, Ethel sums up in her character the virtues and defects of the highest type of Thackeray women, and, as women go, the type is not so low as might be, though he used to be accused of such a cynical hatred of women. Her greatest fault as a creation is that she talks too much in the interest of the author for the pleasure of the reader. I am far from implying that a woman in choosing the better part cannot

express herself with a breadth and depth worthy of any novelist, but if she is really doing it for herself she will do it in her own way and, as it were, in her own words. This is certainly not the case with Ethel Newcome in her last conversation with the Marquis of Farintosh, where her simple-heartedly selfish lover, not having the author or reader in mind, talks straight from himself, and is perfectly mean and natural. It is not that Ethel says anything out of character; but the critic who reads that scene can hardly help feeling its æsthetic deficiency, in the sort I have suggested.

II

Of course the psychological climax of the story is in the chapter detailing the conversations at Paris between Ethel and Madame de Florac, Ethel and Clive, and finally Clive and Madame de Florac, where the girl definitely refuses her cousin, after long wishing to accept him, and after more or less indecisive love-making between them. The voices are not the very voices of life, nor the words the very words, but the thoughts and feelings are, and at times the voices and the words are. Inevitably the writer who has written much becomes confirmed in his manner, and it is not surprising that there is so much, but that there is so little, of the Thackeray manner in these conversations, which are based upon a familiar Thackeray convention. Here is the make-believe that an old woman like Madame de Florac has kept a love-disappointment alive through a long, loveless marriage, and is promoting, against all the French proprieties, the meeting of her lost lover's son with the girl he loves, out of a romantic tenderness for her own past; here is the clever aristocratic girl who is better than her aristocracy (as we poor plebeians

like to fancy some aristocrats) and who has her dreams, that come and go, of well-losing the world for love; here is the youth, handsome, witty, gifted, who is tempting her to the better part. The girl is letting her heart go, and he is drawing it, and in the background is the old woman with her romantic wishes for his success. The lovers talk it all over with openness on Clive's part, and on Ethel's with at least transparent insincerity; and the result is, like the conception, more natural than the representation, as mostly happens with Thackeray, though in this case the representation is unusually good. I have been reading that chapter over again, and I am not sure but that in Ethel's final speech the author has insinuated a fine satire of her which escaped the unspectacled eyes of my youth. If this is true, he has done it so delicately that it does not audibly clash with the romantic sentiment of the closing passage between Clive and Madame de Florac.

"*Ethel.* 'You spoke quite scornfully of palaces, just now, Clive. I won't say a word about the—the regard which you express for me. I think you have it. Indeed, I do. But it were best not said, Clive; best for me, perhaps, not to own that I know it. In your speeches, my poor boy—and you will please not make any more, or I never can see you or speak to you again, never—you forgot one part of a girl's duty: obedience to her parents. They would never agree to my marrying any one below—any one whose union would not be advantageous in a worldly point of view. I never would give such pain to the poor father, or to the kind soul who has never said a harsh word to me since I was born. My grandmamma, too, is very kind in her way. I came to her of my own free will. When she said that she would leave me her fortune, do you think it was for myself alone that I was glad? My father's passion is to make an estate, and all my brothers and sisters

will be but slenderly portioned. Lady Kew said she would help them if I came to her—it is the welfare of those little people that depends upon me, Clive. Now do you see, *brother*, why you must speak to me so no more? There is the carriage. God bless you, dear Clive.'

"(Clive sees the carriage drive away after Miss Newcome has entered it without once looking up to the window where he stands. When it is gone he goes to the opposite windows of the salon, which are open, towards the garden. The chapel music begins to play from the convent, next door. As he hears it he sinks down, his head in his hands.)

"*Enter Madame de Florac.* (She goes to him with anxious looks.) 'What hast thou, my child? Hast thou spoken?'

"*Clive* (very steadily). 'Yes.'

"*Madame de F.* 'And she loves thee? I know she loves thee.'

"*Clive.* 'You hear the organ of the convent?'

"*Madame de F.* 'Qu'as tu?'

"*Clive.* 'I might as well hope to marry one of the sisters of yonder convent, dear lady.' (He sinks down again and she kisses him.)

"*Clive.* 'I never had a mother, but you seem like one.'

"*Madame de F.* 'Mon fils! Oh, mon fils!'"

This is not melodrama; but it is the highest mood of the theatre, a supreme moment of genteel comedy that sends the play-goers home fancying they have been profoundly stirred. For the rest, does not Ethel talk a little too like an amateur of eighteenth-century English, who has been doing French exercises? Yet she is a genuine girl of the late forenoon or early afternoon of our century; a living personality; a true character, and a noble spirit in spite of her world. If you

compare her with some of the bad characters of the book you may say she is not so good as Mrs. Mackenzie, the mother-in-law of Clive; but then there are very, very few women in fiction as good as that horrible shrew, who afflicts the reader with the same quality of pain that Clive and his father suffer from her. She is wonderfully done; she surpasses in her narrower sphere even Becky Sharp, and no goodness can, æsthetically, hold a candle to her badness. But I incline to think that the goodness of Ethel is artistically better than the badness of Lady Kew; and Ethel's own touches of badness are extremely good. I am not sure that she is as perfectly done as poor, slight, sick Rosa, Clive's wife, but she was much harder to do.

III

The heroines of the mid-century English novelists can hardly be considered in a distinct chronological order. The greatest of these novelists were contemporaries and were synchronously writing the books by which they were best known. Bulwer was still thought a prime talent and was producing his most pretentious fiction when Dickens was of world-wide fame, and Thackeray, always of less popularity than Dickens, had taken a higher place. By this time Kingsley had written "Alton Locke" and was soon to write "Hypatia." George Eliot was beginning to make her way towards the primacy which she finally achieved; Charles Reade was corruscating with all the rockets and pin-wheels and Roman candles of his pseudo-realism; Trollope, a truer artist than any of them, was making himself known by the novels which, until we had Mr. Thomas Hardy's and Mr. George Moore's, reflected English life with a fidelity unapproached since that of Jane

Austen's books. Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Oliphant, and others were coming forward in the second order of talents; the weird genius who gave us "Paul Ferroll" had already made her vivid impression; from her isolation in the alien keeping of Bavaria, Baroness Tautphœus had sent out that great and beautiful story, "The Initials," a product as purely English as if not "made in Germany." In the retrospect these writers seem simultaneous as well as contemporaneous, and one can as well be taken up first as another; but perhaps it will be generally allowed that the Brontë sisters, especially Charlotte and Emily, have a peculiar right to early mention because of the fresh and emphatic character of their contribution to fiction, and I feel it peculiarly fit to speak of Charlotte Brontë after Thackeray because of the malignant error which connected her first novel with his name as a supposed "satire" of the man whom she idolized as a novelist, and because of the noble-minded kindness with which he received the shy girl after she had hurried to London to own "Jane Eyre" to her publisher, and to deny the monstrous imputation. There is somewhere a story of Thackeray sitting by while Charlotte Brontë read with silent tears a cruel review of her book, and ignoring her anguish with silent compassion, which is enough to make one sorry for not finding his fiction always as great as his nature. It makes me feel it in a sort my misfortune that I cannot now give my whole heart and soul in admiration of his work as I used in my younger days; it makes me almost regret the more perfect models of art which I have since known in Jane Austen, in Hawthorne, in George Eliot, in Anthony Trollope, in Thomas Hardy, in George Moore, in Zola and Maupassant and Flaubert, in Tourguénief and Tolstoy, in Galdós and Valdés. How shall I venture to say, then, that no heroine of Thackeray's except Becky Sharp

seems to me quite so alive as the Jane Eyre of Charlotte Brontë, whom I do not class with him intellectually, any more than I class her artistically with the great novelists I have mentioned? She was the first English novelist to present the impassioned heroine; impassioned not in man's sense, but woman's sense, in which love purifies itself of sensuousness without losing fervor.

IV

From the beginning to the ending of her story, Jane Eyre moves a living and consistent soul; from the child we know grow the girl and woman we know, vivid, energic, passionate, as well as good, conscientious, devoted. It was a figure which might have well astonished and alarmed the little fastidious world of fifty years ago, far more smug and complacent than the larger world of to-day, and far more intolerant of any question of religious or social convention; and it is no wonder that the young author should have been attainted of immorality and infidelity, not to name that blacker crime, impropriety. In fact, it must be allowed that "Jane Eyre" does go rather far in a region where women's imaginations are politely supposed not to wander; and the frank recognition of the rights of love as love, and its claims in Rochester as paramount to those of righteous self-will in St. John, is still a little startling. It is never pretended that Rochester is a good man, or that he is in any accepted sense worthy of the girl who listens so fearlessly to his account of the dubious life he has led. The most that can be said for him is that he truly values and loves her, and this is his best, his sole defence in his attempt to marry her while he still has a wife living under his own roof, a hopeless and horrible maniac. When the attempt is

JANE EYRE IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM

frustrated at the altar, and nothing remains for Jane Eyre but to be his on the only possible terms, or to fly, it is not feigned that she is not for a moment tempted. She loves him and she *is* tempted, but only for a moment, and then she chooses the right, owning that the wrong has allured her with a courage that was once very novel, but without a suggestion of the pruriency which has often characterized later fiction (especially the fiction of women) in dealing with like situations.

In this as in other essentials "Jane Eyre" is unsparingly human, and when Jane has got away from Rochester, and finds herself unexpectedly among her kindred, and even rich and independent, she does not prefer a loveless marriage, hallowed by the most exalted motives, with her cousin St. John, but elects rather to go back and seek out the man she loves, and when she has found him opportunely widowed by the disaster that has maimed and blinded him, to marry him. She offers no defence, and one must confess that the close of the story is not ideal. No part of the story, in fact, is so good as the beginning, where the hapless little orphan substantiates herself to us in the hard keeping of her cruel aunt and cousins; and in my second reading of the novel I have not been so much moved by the love-making between Jane and Rochester as I must have been when I first read it fifty years ago.

Rochester is of the forceful type of lover, and he seems scarcely so interesting as the plain little governess of his natural daughter thinks him, and as a whole contemporaneous generation of young girls once thought him. He has passed with his kind, and with several successive kinds; but in his time, as I have said, he was a true lover, and he began to be in love with Jane as soon as she with him. He likes her better than the insolent young ladies of his own rank whom he asks to his house, and with the proudest and coldest of whom

he has some thoughts of committing bigamy before he attempts it with Jane. But neither at this time nor at that last time when she seeks him out, blind and maimed, is he so satisfactory in his part of hero as she in hers of heroine. Perhaps a hero who has been both punished and martyred is a little difficult to the imagination; and a hero who is condescending in his love is not much easier. But before this there is a signal moment when the lovers are unconsciously trembling towards each other, and are precipitated into consciousness of their passion by one of the grisly catastrophes of the story, which is illustrative of character in each; and I think that at least its older readers will like to see them in this moment again, though some young readers may think them a little old-fashioned, meeting them in it for the first time.

Jane has already heard a wild laugh from that part of the house where the crazy wife is confined, unknown to her, when on a certain night the lunatic makes her escape from her keeper; and the girl has gone to bed with vague, melancholy thoughts of Rochester. "But it was not fated that I should sleep that night. A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when . . . a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed, and deep—was uttered, as it seemed, at the very key-hole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin laugher stood at my bedside —or, rather, crouched by my pillow; but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated, and I knew it came from behind the panels. . . . Something gurgled and moaned. Ere long, steps retreated up the gallery, toward the third-story staircase. . . . There was a candle burning just outside, left on the matting of the gallery. . . . I was amazed to perceive the air quite dim, as if filled with smoke. . . . Something

JANE EYRE AND ROCHESTER

creaked; it was a door ajar, and that door was Mr. Rochester's, and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence. . . . In an instant I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of the blaze and vapor Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep. 'Wake, wake!' I cried. I shook him, but he only murmured and turned: the smoke had stupefied him. Not a moment could be lost: the very sheets were kindling. I rushed to his basin and ewer; fortunately the one was wide and the other was deep, and both were filled with water. I heaved them up, and deluged the bed and its occupant. . . . The hiss of the quenched element, . . . the splash of the shower bath I had liberally bestowed, roused Mr. Rochester at last. Though it was now dark, I knew he was awake; because I heard him fulminating strange anathemas at finding himself lying in a pool of water. 'Is there a flood?' he cried. 'No, sir,' I answered, 'but there has been a fire.' . . . 'In the name of all the elves of Christendom, is that Jane Eyre? . . . Have you plotted to drown me?' 'I will fetch you a candle, sir; and in Heaven's name get up. Somebody has plotted something: you cannot too soon find out who and what it is.' 'There, I am up, now; but at your peril you fetch a candle yet: wait two minutes till I get into some dry garments, if any dry there be—yes, here is my dressing-gown; now run!' I did run; I brought the candle which still remained in the gallery. He took it from my hand, surveyed the bed, blackened and scorched, the sheets drenched, the carpet round swimming in water. 'What is it and who did it?' he asked. . . . I briefly related to him what had transpired. . . . He listened very gravely; his face as I went on expressed more concern than astonishment. . . . 'You have a shawl on? . . . Wrap it about you, and sit down

in the arm-chair; there—I will put it on. . . . I am going to leave you a few minutes. I shall take the candle. . . . I must pay a visit to the second story. Don't move, remember, or call any one.' He went: I watched the light withdraw. He passed up the gallery very softly, unclosed the staircase door with as little noise as possible, shut it after him, and the last ray vanished. I was left in total darkness. . . . A very long time elapsed. . . . I was on the point of risking Mr. Rochester's displeasure by disobeying his orders, when a light once more gleamed dimly on the gallery wall, and I heard his unshod feet tread the matting. . . . He re-entered, pale and very gloomy. 'I have found it all out,' said he, setting his candle down on the wash-stand; 'it is as I thought. . . . You are no talking fool; say nothing about it. I will account for this state of affairs' (pointing to the bed): 'and now retire to your own room. I shall do very well on the sofa in the library for the rest of the night.' . . . 'Good-night, then, sir,' said I, departing. . . . 'What!' he exclaimed. 'Are you quitting me already, and in that way? Why, you have saved my life!—and you walk past me as if we were mutual strangers! At least shake hands.' He held out his hand; I gave him mine: he took it first in one, then in both his. 'I knew,' he continued, 'you would do me good, in some way, at some time;—I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you: their expression and smile did not'—(again he stopped)—'did not' (he proceeded hastily) 'strike delight to my inmost heart for nothing. People talk of mutual natural sympathies; I have heard of Good Genii: there are grains of truth in the wildest fable. My cherished preserver, good-night.' Strange energy was in his voice, strange fire was in his look. 'I am glad I happened to be awake,' I said, and then I was going. 'What, will you go!' 'I am cold, sir.' 'Cold?

Yes, and standing in a pool. Go, then, Jane, go!' But he still retained my hand, and I could not free it. I bethought myself of an expedient. 'I think I hear Mrs. Fairfax move, sir,' said I. 'Well, leave me.' He relaxed his fingers and I was gone."

V

Old-fashioned, I have suggested; but now, after reading this passage, I find that hardly the word. It is old-fashioned only in the sense of being very simple, and of a quaint sincerity. The fact is presented, the tremendous means are used, with almost childlike artlessness; but the result is of high novelty. Few would have had the courage to deal so frankly with the situation, to chance its turning ludicrous, or would have had the skill to unfold its fine implications of tenderness, and keep them undamaged by the matter-of-fact details. But Charlotte Brontë did all this, and did it out of the resources of her own unique experience of life, which never presented itself in the light of common day, but came to her through strange glooms, and in alternations of native solitude and alien multitude, at Haworth and in Brussels. The whole story, so deeply of nature, is steeped in the supernatural; and just as paradoxically the character of Jane Eyre lacks that final projection from the author which is the supreme effect of art, only because she feels it so intensely that she cannot detach it from herself.

THE TWO CATHARINES OF EMILY BRONTË

THE heroines of Charlotte Brontë's other books made no such impression upon her public as Jane Eyre, but perhaps one heroine of the first rank is enough for one author; so many authors have invented no memorable heroine at all. "Jane Eyre" was an epochal book, assembling in itself the elements of that electrical disturbance which had been gathering in the minds of women for a generation, and discharging them in a type, a character, which expressed their discontent with their helplessness, their protest against their conditions, their longing for equality with men, as from time to time some real or imaginary personality will. It is extremely interesting, viewed in this light, and if it expressed the weakness that is always seeking to be at rest in strength, or to be changed directly or indirectly into strength, then the fact has its own pathos, which every true man must respect.

Rochester is such a man as most women, or most girls, would like to be when they Oh to be men. They would like to be rough if they cannot be strong on other terms; they would even be wicked if they must, and would willingly suffer for their wickedness if only so they could be strong. But failing all this, they would at least like to be the sort of woman or sort of girl who is indispensable and vitally essential to strength, as Jane Eyre is in her relation to Rochester. The pity is that they should not see that Jane is really strong, and Rochester is really weak; but Jane does not see

this herself, and it is doubtful whether her author saw it. What she and her lonely sisters worshipped in the dreary vicarage at Haworth was manly strength; but from the father and brother, who were the only men they knew, they could not imagine this apart from wilfulness and caprice and error; and so they gave us Rochester in "Jane Eyre," and Heathcliff in "Wuthering Heights," with women to suffer for them, and to illustrate or inspire their power. Charlotte Brontë created the impassioned heroine, as I have called Jane Eyre, and Emily Brontë created the lawless heroine, like the two Catharines; but all their heroines measurably shared in the fascination which brutality, the false image of strength, seems to have for weakness. In these characters they changed the ideal of fiction for many a long day, and established the bullied heroine in a supremacy which she held till the sinuous heroine began softly but effectually to displace her.

I

The heroines of Emily Brontë have not the artistic completeness of Charlotte Brontë's. They are blocked out with hysterical force, and in their character there is something elemental, as if, like the man who beat and browbeat them, they too were close to the savagery of nature. The sort of supernaturalism which appears here and there in their story wants the refinement of the telepathy and presentiment which play a part in Jane Eyre, but it is still more effectual in the ruder clutch which it lays upon the fancy.

In her dealing with the wild passion of Heathcliff for the first Catharine, Emily Brontë does not keep even such slight terms with convention as Charlotte does in the love of Rochester and Jane Eyre; but this fierce longing, stated as it were in its own language, is still

farther from anything that corrupts or tempts; it is as wholesome and decent as a thunder-storm, in the consciousness of the witness. The perversities of the mutual attraction of the lovers are rendered without apparent sense on the part of the author that they can seem out of nature, so deeply does she feel them to be in nature, and there is no hint from her that they need any sort of proof. It is vouchsafed us to know that Heathcliff is a foundling of unknown origin, early fixed in his hereditary evils by the cruelty of Hindley Earnshaw, whose father has adopted him; but it is not explained why he should have his malign power upon Catharine. Perhaps it is enough that she is shown a wilful, impetuous, undisciplined girl, whose pity has been moved for the outcast before her fancy is taken. After that we are told what happens and are left to account for it as we may.

We are very badly told, in terms of autobiography thrice involved. First, we have the narrative of Heathcliff's tenant, then within his the narrative of the tenant's housekeeper, as she explains the situation she has witnessed at Heathcliff's house, and then within hers the several narratives of the actors in the tragedy. Seldom has a great romance been worse contrived, both as to generals and particulars, but the essentials are all there, and the book has a tremendous vitality. If it were of the fashion of any other book, it might have passed away, but it is of its own fashion solely, and it endures like a piece of the country in which its scenes are laid, enveloped in a lurid light and tempestuous atmosphere of its own. Its people are all of extreme types, and yet they do not seem unreal, like the extravagant creations of Dickens's fancy; they have an intense and convincing reality, the weak ones, such as Heathcliff's wife and son, equally with the powerful, such as Heathcliff himself and the Catharines, mother and daughter.

A weird malevolence broods over the gloomy drama, and through all plays a force truly demoniacal, with scarcely the relief of a moment's kindliness. The facts are simply conceived, and stated without shadow of apology or extenuation; and the imagination from which they sprang cannot adequately be called morbid, for it deals with the brute motives employed without a taint of sickly subjectiveness. The author remains throughout superior to her material; her creations have all a distinct projection, and in this Emily Brontë shows herself a greater talent than Charlotte, who is never quite detached from her heroine, but is always trammelled in sympathy with Jane Eyre, with whom she is united by ties of a like vocation and experience, as governess. You feel that she is present in all Jane's sufferings, small and great, if not in her raptures; but Emily Brontë keeps as sternly aloof from both her Catharines as from Heathcliff himself. She bequeathed the world at her early death a single book of as singular power as any in fiction; and proved herself, in spite of its defective technique, a great artist, of as realistic motive and ideal as any who have followed her.

II

It is not easy to gather up the thread of the story from the several narratives within narratives and find one's way by the tangled clew to the close. But after Earnshaw brings home from Liverpool the gypsy foundling whom his son hates and misuses he dies, and as this son sinks more and more into drunkenness, it is natural and fated that his wilful sister Catharine should pity the dark, silent boy, who repays her pity with all the passion of his turbulent heart. When they are no longer girl and boy, and it is a question of her loving

Heathcliff, she marries if she does not love Edgar Linton, of her own rank and kind, and Heathcliff, returning from years of self-exile, marries Isabella Linton, against her brother's will and without the pretence of love. His brute force fascinates the slight, romantic coquette, and she dies of his cruelty, leaving a son in whose feeble soul her folly centres, with an infusion of the father's malevolence. Catharine dies, and her daughter Catharine inherits her waywardness without her powerful will, which could bend even Heathcliff's. He, by his ruthless cleverness, comes to dominate Hindley Earnshaw through Earnshaw's besetting sin, and gathers the estate into his own control, pushing aside the heir, Hareton Earnshaw, whom he has imbruted, as Hareton's father imbruted him in his time, and kept ignorant as a peasant and even more savage. After Catharine's death he schemes to marry her daughter to his son, and so come into the Linton property as well. In spite of Edgar Linton, the broken and dying father, he succeeds in enticing the girl to his house again and again, and he does finally effect the union of the children, while they are yet scarcely more than children. His son dies, and then Cathy lives with Heathcliff, a terrorized torment, till Heathcliff dies too, hated as he has been by all except the hapless Hareton Earnshaw, whom he has abused and defrauded, but who truly laments him. The reader is left to forecast a marriage between Hareton and Cathy, whom he has always loved, but who has outrageously mocked and insulted him.

Within this outline the author makes it not only possible but imperative for the reader to believe that in rural England of the mid-century savageries were of occurrence among people of not ungentle condition, and atrocious wrongs were perpetrated, such as would be incredible without her compelling magic, though things like them are well enough known to science.

Throughout there is a dumb ache in the witness for help against Heathcliff, whose infernal will fulfils itself in spite of everything, and whose cunning intrenches him so safely that he does not defy so much as boldly ignore the laws under which other men live. Once or twice he is in danger of them, but chance as well as his own hardihood and subtlety befriend him; and when he dies successful in all his purposes, and dominant over all those he has put under him, a thrill of perverse sympathy with him softens the reader's heart. Heathcliff is a great creation, but the women of the story are imagined with truth as great, and to hardly less tremendous effect. I am not sure indeed that the effect in the case of the first Catharine is less tremendous at all times, or at least I should be puzzled to match with any scene in which he rules certain passages where she is the chief figure. The reader will perhaps have in mind, as I have, their meeting when Catharine has been sick wellnigh to death from the quarrel between Heathcliff and her husband, and Heathcliff, always lurking about Linton's house, makes his forbidden entrance, and finds his way to her room. It is Mrs. Dean, the housekeeper, who tells the tale in this part.

"He did not hit the right door directly; she motioned to me to admit him, but he found it ere I could reach the door, and in a stride or two he was at her side, and had grasped her in his arms. He neither spoke nor loosed his hold for some five minutes, during which period he bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before, I dare say: but then my mistress had kissed him first, and I plainly saw that he could hardly bear, for downright agony, to look in her face. . . . 'Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! How can I bear it?' was the first sentence he uttered, in a tone that did not seek to disguise his despair. . . . 'What now?' said Catharine, leaning back and returning his look with a sud-

denly clouded brow: her humor was a mere vane for constantly varying caprices. 'You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff. And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if *you* were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity *you*, not I. You have killed me, and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?' Heathcliff had knelt on one knee to support her; he attempted to rise, but she seized his hair and kept him down. 'I wish I could hold you,' she bitterly continued, 'till we were both dead. I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do! Will you forget me? Will you be happy when I am in the earth? Will you say, twenty years hence, "That's the grave of Catharine Earnshaw. I loved her long ago, and was wretched to lose her, but that's past. I've loved many others since: my children are dearer to me than she was; and at death I shall not rejoice that I am going to her: I shall be sorry that I must leave them." Will you say that, Heathcliff?' 'Don't torture me till I'm as mad as yourself,' cried he, wrenching his head free and grinding his teeth. . . . While raising himself with one hand, he had taken her arm with the other; and so inadequate was his stock of gentleness to the requirements of her condition, that on his letting go I saw four distinct impressions left blue in the colorless skin. 'Are you possessed with a devil?' he pursued savagely, 'to talk in that manner to me when you are dying? You know you lie when you say that I have killed you; and, Catharine, you know that I could as soon forget you as my own existence! Is it not sufficient for your infernal selfishness that while you are at peace I shall writhe in the torments of hell?' 'I shall not be at peace,' moaned Catharine, recalled to a sense of physical weakness by the violent, unequal throbbing

"SHE LENDS HERSELF TO HEATHCLIFF'S PURPOSES"

of her heart, which beat visibly and audibly under this excess of agitation. She said nothing farther till the paroxysm was over; then she continued more kindly—'I'm not wishing you greater torment than I have, Heathcliff. I only wish us never to be parted. . . . Won't you come here again? Do!' Heathcliff went back to her chair and leant over her, but not so far as to let her see his face, which was livid with emotion. She bent round to look at him: he would not permit it: turning abruptly, he walked to the fireplace, where he stood silent with his back towards us. . . . In her eagerness she rose, and supported herself on the arm of her chair. At that earnest appeal he turned to her. . . . An instant they held asunder; and then how they met I hardly knew, but Catharine made a spring and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive. . . . She put up her hand to clasp his neck, and bring his cheek to her own. . . . 'You teach me now how cruel you have been—cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me and cry; and wring out my tears and kisses: they'll blight you, they'll damn you. You loved me—then what right had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton?' . . . 'Let me alone. Let me alone,' sobbed Catharine. 'If I've done wrong, I'm dying for it. It is enough. You left me too, but I won't upbraid you. I forgive you; forgive me!' 'It is hard to forgive, and look at those eyes, and feel these wasted hands,' he answered. 'Kiss me again, and don't let me see your eyes! I can forgive you for what you've done to me. I love *my* murderer—but *yours!* How can I?' They were silent—their faces hid against each other, and

washed by each other's tears. 'Service is over,' I announced. 'My master will be here in half an hour.' Heathcliff groaned a curse, and strained Catharine closer: she never stirred. . . . 'Now he is here,' I exclaimed. 'For heaven's sake hurry down. You'll not meet any one at the front stairs.' 'I must go, Cathy,' said Heathcliff, seeking to extricate himself from his companion's arms. . . . 'You must not go!' she answered, holding him as firmly as her strength allowed. 'You shall not, I tell you.' He would have risen, and unfixed her fingers by the act; she clung fast, gasping. 'No!' she shrieked. 'Oh, don't, don't go! It is the last time! Edgar will not hurt us. Heathcliff, I shall die! I shall die!' 'Damn the fool! There he is!' cried Heathcliff, sinking back into his seat. 'Hush, my darling! Hush, hush, Catharine! I'll stay. If he shot me so, I'd expire with a blessing on my lips.' . . . Edgar sprang to his unbidden guest, blanched with astonishment and rage. What he meant to do I cannot tell; however, the other stopped all demonstrations at once by placing the lifeless form in his arms. 'Look there!' he said; 'unless you be a fiend, help her first—then you shall speak to me.'"

III

It might be thought that Catharine Linton was sufficiently involved in her ungoverned impulses; but her daughter Catharine is of a still more labyrinthine lawlessness. She has her father's violent temperament, as well as his complexion; her malice, if qualities can be assigned a tint, is peculiarly blond, while her mother's fury was brunette. She lends herself to Heathcliff's purposes by her disobedience to her father, and first puts herself in his power by a romantic fancy for his

"'YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME FIRST'"

weakling son, whom she only despises when Heathcliff has forced their marriage, and her husband willingly and even gladly abandons her to his father's barbarity. She effectively lives Heathcliff's prisoner till he dies, but she never yields in spirit to him, though quelled by blows into a literal submission; and from time to time she breaks out into reckless taunts and defiances. It is an exposition of woman's nature unparalleled in some traits. She has been delicately bred in her father's house, and educated, if not disciplined; she would be expected to have the instincts of a class; but she seems not to feel the insult of Heathcliff's blows so much as to dread the mere pain; and you cannot help believing these are the facts of the case. You know it to be also true that he never relents to her out of tenderness for her mother's memory; and that in the mere wantonness of her power she is quite capable of lacerating the proud, ignorant soul of the only man who could have protected her against his ferocity. Surely that side of a girl's nature was never so unsparingly studied as in the love-making between Hareton and Catharine, who first rouses all the wild beast in him by laughing at his crude attempts to learn from her teaching, and then tames it to her will by the arts which her growing fancy for him inspires.

"Earnshaw sat, morose as usual, at the chimney corner, and my little mistress was beguiling an idle hour with drawing pictures on the window-panes, varying her amusement by smothered bursts of songs, and whispered ejaculations, and quick looks of annoyance and impatience in the direction of her cousin, who steadfastly smoked and looked into the grate. . . . Presently I heard her begin, 'I've found out, Hareton, that I want—that I'm glad—that I should like you to be my cousin now, if you had not grown so cross to me and so rough.' Hareton returned no answer. . . . 'Let

me take that pipe,' she said, cautiously advancing her hand and abstracting it from his mouth. Before he could attempt to recover it, it was broken and behind the fire. He swore at her and seized another. 'Stop,' she cried; 'you must listen to me first, and I can't speak while those clouds are floating in my face.' 'Will you go to the devil!' he exclaimed, ferociously, 'and let me be!' 'No,' she persisted, 'I won't. Come, you *shall* take notice of me, Hareton: you are my cousin, and you shall own me.' 'I shall have nothing to do with you and your mucky pride, and your damned mocking tricks. Side o' t' gate, now, this minute!' Catharine frowned, and retreated to the window-seat, chewing her lip, and endeavoring, by humming an eccentric tune, to conceal a growing tendency to sob. . . . 'You hate me, as much as Mr. Heathcliff does, and more.' 'You're a damned liar,' began Earnshaw. 'Why have I made him angry, by taking your part, a hundred times? And that when you sneered at me and despised me, and—' 'I didn't know you took my part,' she answered, drying her eyes, 'and I was miserable, and bitter at everybody; but now I thank you, and beg you to forgive me: what can I do besides?' She returned to the hearth and frankly extended her hand. He blackened and scowled like a thunder-cloud, and kept his fists resolutely clinched, and his gaze fixed on the ground. Catharine, by instinct, must have divined that it was obdurate perversity and not dislike that prompted this dogged conduct, for, after remaining an instant undecided, she stooped and impressed on his cheek a gentle kiss. . . . 'Say you forgive me, Hareton, do. You can make me so happy by speaking that little word.' He muttered something inaudible. 'And you'll be my friend?' added Catharine, interrogatively. 'Nay, you'll be ashamed of me every day of your life,' he answered, 'and the more ashamed the more you know me,

and I cannot bide it.' 'So you won't be my friend?' she said, smiling as sweet as honey and creeping close up."

No one can deny the charm of this, the absolute reality, the consummate art, which is still art, however unconscious. Did the dying girl who wrote the strange book, where it is only one of so many scenes of unfaltering truth, know how great it was, with all its defects? In any case criticism must recognize its mastery and rejoice in its courage.

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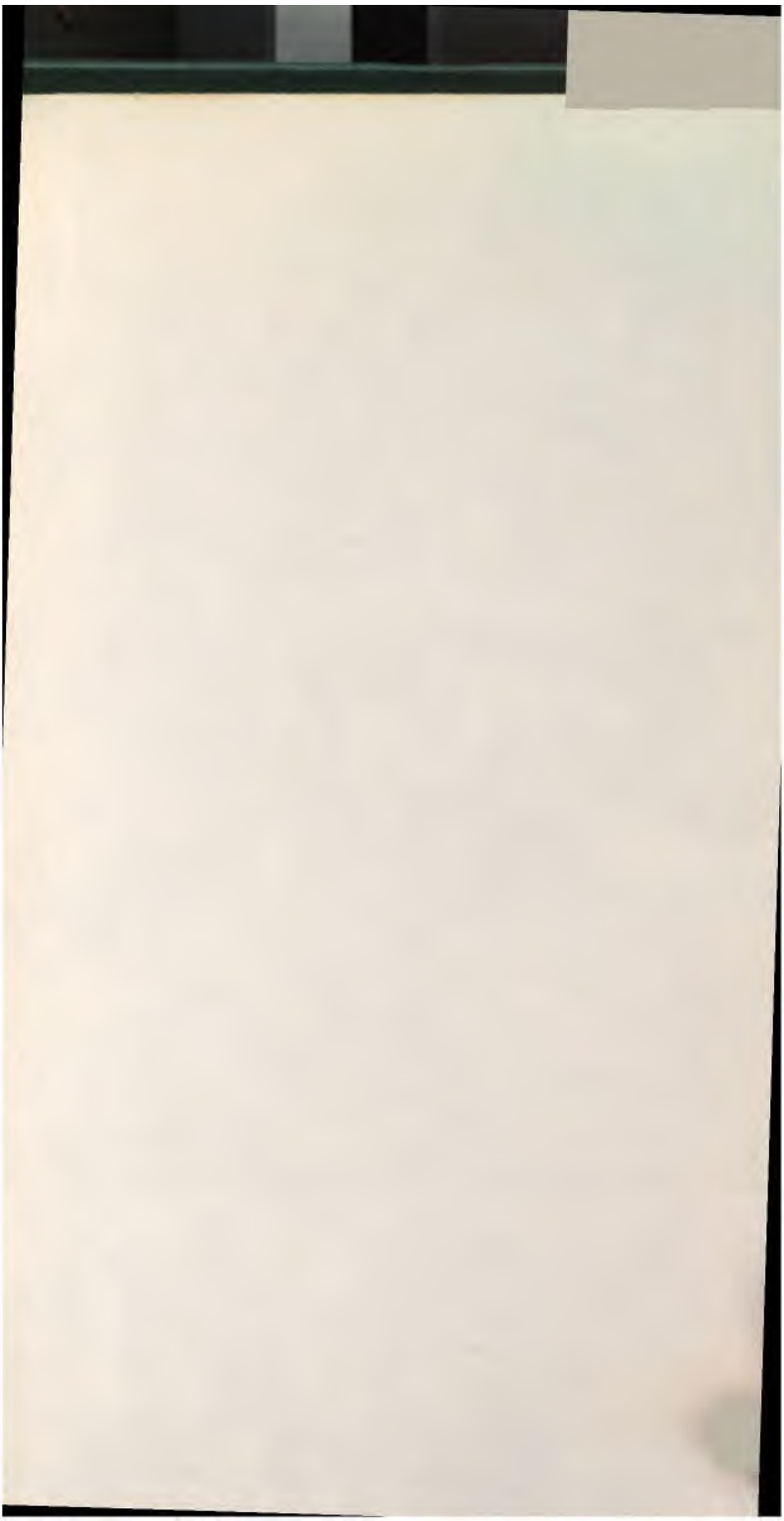

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